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BRAVE AND BOLD

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No 10

KING OF THE AIR
or Lost in the
Sargasso Sea



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BRAVE & BOLD

A Different Complete Story Every Week

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KING OF THE AIR;

OR,

Lost in the Sargasso Sea.

BY HOWARD HASKINS.

CHAPTER I.

THE CABIN IN THE CLEARING.

"What's that?" asked the younger of the two lads trudging through the storm and rain, as a flash of lightning illumined a moment a stretch of water.

"Must be Lake Constance—we ought to be about there by this time."

"Lake Constance or Lake Mary Ann, I only wish it was the lake in Central Park," grumbled the other, the younger and smaller of the pair. "This is a great pleasure tour we're makin' and no mistake. There! If we hadn't had that flash, we might have walked into the water, and it would have been all up with us."

"Couldn't get much wetter than we are, Gid. We must look for a shelter or we'll leave our bones in Switzerland. Come, get a gait on you," taking his companion and hurrying him along through the wet woods.

"Suppose we go a little slow; we might break our necks in a hole or toddle overboard. You haven't got to catch a train."

"No, but I've got to catch a cold, if I don't find a dry spot soon," as he proceeded to hustle his companion along.

The two American boys were on their way home from Paris, where they had been working, and were seeing what sights they could on the way. Trudging most of the distance on foot, they had become lost in the woods.

Dick Henslow, the pilot of the expedition, knew they were on the edge of Lake Constance, but that was a small satisfaction, since they had been wandering for hours without finding a habitation.

As the roar of the wind ceased for a moment, he drew his companion up short with a warning "Hist!"

"What's the matter? Got 'em again?" asked Gid Crossly, the younger.

"I thought I heard the sound of a voice. Can't tell, though, for that wind roars like a catamount with the stomach ache."

"Mebbe it was one," and his companion drew up closer to him.

"Bah! Don't let that frighten you. They don't have such things in this part of the country, except stuffed or in a zoo."

Though the younger had confidence in the other's superior wisdom, he was far from feeling comforted.

"Help—help!"

The scream arose above the roar of the storm, and, heard in the depths of that somber wood, struck a feeling of fear even in Dick Henslow's heart.

In a moment, however, he had recovered his nerve, and seized his companion by the arm, dragging him along in the direction of the sound.

"No animal about that, unless it was a mighty educated one. We must look into this, Gid, for if that wasn't the voice of an American, I don't know my own people."

They dashed along in the gloom, unable to see their way, now falling down as they stumbled over the roots of trees, now struck in the face by wet projecting branches.

Gid Crossly, though he at first displayed fear, was roused at the thought of one of his countrymen being in peril, and needed no urging to follow his companion.

It was only when they were out of breath and exhausted with their rapid flight that they halted for a moment.

"How'll we know which way to take?" asked Gid, for it was as densely black as ever and the appealing cry for help was not repeated.

"We can only trust to luck. Root around on the ground, Gid, for a club, for we may need it if we want to be of any service to that poor devil."

There was no trouble in supplying themselves with such rude weapons, for the ground was littered with broken branches. Even in the dark they could find what they wanted.

"Steady, boy! What's that moving along the right?"

Gid, looking in the direction pointed out, saw a pale light moving slowly along, that flashed out at intervals, and then was obscured.

"Might be a swamp light!" gasped Gid, fear creeping over him again. He had not had the benefit of education like his companion, and was a little superstitious, and fearful even of natural wonders.

"Not on your life! If I'm not mistaken, it's some one carrying a lantern," replied his companion. "Come on, let's see what this means. I shouldn't wonder if the bearer of that lantern has something to do with the cry for help. Folks don't go wandering in the woods for pleasure in this kind of weather."

They made their way slowly and cautiously in the direction of the light, which could still be seen flickering faintly through the trees.

In spite of their efforts, they could not help making a noise as they stumbled through the gloom. Fortunately the storm was at its height, and the roar of the wind was enough to deaden any ordinary sound they might make.

They were now very near the moving light, which appeared to be coming straight for them. Dick pulled his companion back among the bushes. Presently a dark figure appeared, and they saw that it was indeed a man carrying a lantern.

"We must follow that chap," whispered Dick. "He'll lead us to where the trouble is."

Gid pressed his hand in acquiescence, and slowly they followed behind the burly figure through the dripping woods.

Presently they entered a clearing, which they could tell by reason that the trees no longer opposed their progress. The ground seemed plowed up, and once they went down together in the mire.

"But the light! Where's the light?" gasped Dick, when they had struggled to their feet.

The lantern and the shadow of its bearer had disappeared.

"He can't be far away—we must find the beggar," said Dick, sturdily.

"I only hope we will get there before the villains have a chance to make mincemeat of the poor fellow, whoever he is. That's what worries me most."

They made their way over the soft ground with difficulty, in the dense darkness, without even the comfort of the lantern to guide them.

"Hello, what's this!" for Dick Henslow had collided with what appeared to be the edge of a building.

"We're at the place, I guess," he whispered, a moment later, as they saw a gleam of light through a shutter. But though they heard a confused sound of voices, they could not see inside the building, which appeared to be a cabin.

They felt their way around it only to find it was as hermetically sealed as a cashbox.

"Well, we haven't gained much by getting here, after all," grumbled Dick Henslow.

"Here's a tree, they must get air from somewhere. Let's shin up and see what we find there," said Gid, and it required two such expert climbers but a moment to be astride the roof tree.

Dick, though he found no window, discovered a trapdoor, which he pried open silently, and they crawled down into a small room, their soaked shoes protecting them from discovery.

Through the flooring they caught gleams of light, and heard loud voices. Selecting each a knothole, they peered down into the interior, lying on their stomachs.

What they saw was three men grouped around a table, on which a bowl of punch was steaming, and from the boisterous sounds, the party had not been sparing of their attentions to it. Off in a corner lay a queer bundle.

"The man we heard crying for help," whispered Dick, who saw that it was indeed a man trussed up like a fowl. Whether dead or only gagged, they could not make out.

It was impossible from where the lads lay to see the faces of the trio about the table, for they sat with their soft hats pulled down over their eyes, puffing on clay pipes and alternately drinking. It was a noisy, boisterous group.

"Harwood is making rapid progress with his work," said one big man. "From what I've seen of the flying ship we won't stand a ghost of a chance to beat him there. He'll reach the Sargasso Sea and reap the treasure before we are halfway."

"No, he won't; for we'll see to it that he never starts!" cried another, dashing his fist down on the table. "What, give up all those millions!"

"But he's a strong man, and has spent a fortune already. Didn't we capture his spy?" pointing to the bundle in the corner. "Which shows he suspects he is watched."

"Bah!" retorted a third man. "After to-morrow, Harwood will be out of sight!" and he laughed in a way that made the young listeners shiver.

Though they knew little of what was being said, they knew that it meant a plot against the life of a man named Harwood, and that he was going in search of treasure which they coveted.

"Well," muttered the big man, who seemed the leader, "I hope you won't fail to settle the question to-morrow."

"Not a bit of doubt about it—the thing is to save my neck afterward," replied the man who had uttered the frightful murderous laugh a moment before. "And now, gents, suppose we get rid of that bundle," pointing with his pipe toward the bound prisoner.

"Jesso!" and the others arose.

"Wait a bit—not yet!" cried one man, in a startled voice. "I hear a noise. Perhaps some of his men are after us."

The three waited for no more, but rushed out of doors. The room was deserted.

"Now's our chance, if we mean to do anything!" whispered Dick, as he crawled along the floor, knowing that there must be a ladder or something communicating with the room below. And so it proved. He found a small trap, raised it, and went down the ladder into the room. To rush over to the prisoner and cut his bonds was the work of a moment. It was no time for words. They ran up the ladder again to the floor above, and had just time to close the trap when the rascals entered.

"False alarm," grumbled the big man. "And now to close accounts with the prisoner."

"Why, he's gone!" yelled one, with a round oath.

"The upper floor—he must be there! No other way out!"

They dashed up the ladder and the three above heard them coming.

"To the roof," cried Dick Henslow, as they heard the trap splintered.

The others followed him, and they straddled the roof tree, hearing the ruffians raging about on the floor under them.

They had just jumped to the ground when, looking up, they saw a fierce face, waving a torch, appearing above the edge of the roof. Dick could not resist the temptation to utter a defiant yell.

"Scatter now," he cried, as the door of the cabin was burst open and the two lads and the man they had saved ran through the woods followed by three yelling pursuers.

Half an hour later Dick came up with his companion, lying under a tree. He was panting and exhausted, but not hurt.

"And the man we rescued?" asked Henslow.

"Lost him in the dark. Hope they didn't catch him," as Gid rose up.

"He had a good start, so I guess they'll have trouble laying hold of him again."

"It would be too bad if we had risked so much for nothing."

They walked on, and saw the lights of a town gleaming beyond.

"We'll sleep to-night, if we never did before, old pard," said Dick. "We got on the trail of a murderous plot to-night, and we must save the victim if we can."

They sought out a little inn, and leaving their clothes to dry, went to bed to sleep sound in spite of the exciting experience they had passed through, and to dream of the mysterious treasure and the owner of the flying ship.

CHAPTER II.

A CALLER FROM THE CLOUDS.

"Got a fit, Gid! What are you up to now?"

"Get out of the way of that thing. If it dropped on us, where do you suppose we'd be?"

It was the day after their experience in the woods.

The youngest of the two boys in the boat said this in a frightened voice, and making a dash for the oars began to row as if his very life depended upon it.

"I never thought you could be such a muff, Gid Crossly!" laughed his companion, who now, as we see him by daylight, proves to be a manly, intelligent-looking young fellow of about eighteen years. "What would your cronies in New York say if they could see you now? I thought you had some nerve. Why, the thing won't eat you!"

Gid dropped the oars a little sullenly, rather ashamed of his display of fear. He was several years younger than his companion, a short dumpy little figure, with a freckled and good-natured face. "It takes a good deal to bump me," he grumbled, resting on the oars. "But when it comes to stackin' up against a thing like that I jest feel like pitchin' my hand in the discard."

As he spoke, he pointed above their heads, where a curious object could be seen. It was like an enormous cylinder, with pointed ends, and from the lower side depended two cars connected by what appeared to be a gallery. It drifted lazily above the placid waters of Lake Constance, like a strange monster swimming in the upper world.

The sudden appearance of such a wonder outlined against the sky might well startle a cooler head than Gid Crossly's.

This was nothing else than the flying ship invented by the German officer, Count Zeppelin, after many years of labor. It has made his name famous throughout the world. The first creation

of its kind that proves beyond doubt the possibility of navigating the air.

Dick Henslow, the older of the two Americans in the boat, being of a mechanical turn of mind, was too much interested in the evolutions of the ship above their heads to feel frightened.

His purpose in coming to Switzerland was the hope of getting a glimpse of it.

Could the talk they heard the night before refer to this flying ship?

Both lads had been working in Paris. They had saved up their money to go to Europe to see the sights, and had seen Paris, working their way, Gid selling newspapers and the older boy working as a machinist.

"I guess I'll never get so far away from Park Row again," Gid had said, about the time they were deciding to start for home; "less some millionaire girl gets stuck on me, so we might as well see the rest of the layout if it costs us our back hair."

"Right you are, Gidsey," Dick had replied. "But don't think your money will last forever, and blow it in reckless. We happen to be where we can't very well walk home, without getting wet feet."

So the pilgrimage homeward began, and they enjoyed themselves as only two American lads can who have worked hard and are out for a good old time.

Their experience, when lost in the woods, had been their first real adventure.

They little knew that from that hour they would meet with many, as remarkable as wonderful.

The news of Count Zeppelin's conquest of the air was just then filling the newspapers, and Dick made up his mind to enter Switzerland and see it.

Gid Crossly was willing enough, though he felt little curiosity on the subject of flying ships. So that afternoon they had taken a boat on Lake Constance, and gone out to fish and incidentally get a view of the great air ship.

Gid was not a coward, but when the huge machine hovered for a moment above their heads, floating huge as a man-of-war, in the ether, he had certainly displayed fear and an anxiety to get out of the neighborhood.

"I don't know that it would shake us much if it did drop on us," continued Dick, who liked to tease. "It's nothing but a bag of wind. Seventeen balloons in a row, hid in a cylinder-shaped shell."

"It looks mighty solid, anyway," replied the other, as he surveyed the structure now sweeping above the lake. "Must be nigh as long as the steamer I crossed the ocean on."

"Four hundred and twenty feet long, sonny, and that's quite a good length for a boat. Those two cars are twenty feet, but from here they don't look much bigger than pill boxes."

Gid was beginning to get interested in spite of his first fears, for he would not have been a boy, otherwise.

"Say, if we'd had one of those things when we fought the Spaniards, and a pile of dynamite shells aboard, wouldn't we have jarred the Greasers, I don't think!"

The ship was propelled back and forth by means of two air screws and steered by two great finlike rudders fore and aft.

There was little breeze blowing, that day, and the great structure moved about as if drifting in a calm sea. It rose and sank and circled about in graceful fashion, for all its ponderous proportions.

"When you get back among the boys in Park Row you'll have something to talk about," said Dick.

"More likely I'll run a chance of gettin' my head punched for bein' a liar! Think those guys would believe me if I give them

such a steer? I'd have a fight every time I tried to spring such a story on 'em. What's the flyin' sausage good for, anyway? Guess she wouldn't have much luck takin' out pleasure parties."

"Don't you believe it. We may both of us live to see the day when they will have lines of 'em chasing across the ocean."

"Gwan!"

"Yes, and the North and South Pole won't be mysterious any more. She could go rolling around all the corners of the earth where never a soul had been before," he spoke, enthusiastically, for boy though he was, he saw the possibilities of a ship that could navigate the air, and he was enough of a mechanic to recognize that at last a practical machine had been discovered.

"Well, when they have little ones chasin' up and down Broadway in the place of horse cars, you bet I won't be sellin' papers on 'em," said Gid. "If the do-funny got out of order, how would it be when you banged into one of those skyscrapers?"

"Oh, I guess it's a long way off till we come to that," with a laugh.

"Just the same, I'd like to take a ride on the machine," as he looked longingly toward the distant ship, as it swept through the clear air without a sound. "I wonder what the birds think of it. Must be considerable of a surprise to 'em."

"Here's she's comin' back again!" cried Gid, as the ship turned about gracefully and seemed to be heading toward them. "I'd just as leave she would keep away from over our heads," a little anxiously. "These things are always blowin' up and bustin', and I don't want to be took home in pieces."

As the great ship approached she was so near the surface of the water that they could easily watch the operation of the great air screws. They saw that the two aluminum cars each contained four men. Suddenly, as the ship was almost directly over their heads, Dick Henslow jumped excitedly to his feet.

"Say, Gid, there's some trouble in one of those cars!" at the same time pointing to the forward one, in which the man seemed to be either quarreling or engaged in some altercation.

"What's that!" exclaimed Gid, whose keen intelligence, too, scented something wrong; and caused him to forget his fears.

As they looked up to the great mass, a dark object suddenly shot out of one of the cars down from the sheer height toward the lake!

"It's a man—tumbled or pushed out!" yelled Dick, and then, making a dash for the oars, rowed vigorously toward the place where the man had sunk.

The flying ship had meanwhile swept on, and the boat in which the young Americans were was the only craft near enough to lend any aid to the victim of the disaster.

"Why, where did he go?" asked Dick, for the boat had reached the place where they thought the man had sunk.

Not a ripple stirred the surface of the lake around them, and of anything human there was not a sign.

"Must have struck his head and gone down."

"Even so, he ought to float to the top again," replied Henslow.

"Whatcher goin' to do?" as the other peeled off his coat and flung it down, and then kicked off his shoes.

"See if I can find him," briefly, and then took a header into the lake, while Gid watched him, anxiously.

"Thunder, how long he stays under!" wailed the newsboy. "Like as not he's found the man and he's been dragged down."

But the words had hardly fallen from his lips before the surface of the lake was disturbed. Dick Henslow, panting, arose, grasping a limp figure in his arms.

"Help! Gid, help!"

There was no need to remind his friend what to do, for the

boat was alongside of him the next moment. Gid helped Dick and his burden into the boat.

"I thought you were a goner and no mistake," said Gid, anxiously.

"I was near it, very near it," and then, "but the other—he looks as if he had passed away," and indeed the figure at the bottom of the boat gave no signs of life. He was a fine-looking, handsomely-dressed man of middle age, and his eyes were closed.

"If he isn't dead, it's the next thing to it," muttered the young mechanic. "We must rush him ashore and get the water out of him," and bending to the oars they sent the boat flying for the strand.

CHAPTER III.

THE LOST CHART.

"He's a husky old fellow and no mistake!" exclaimed Gid Crossly, as he stopped to draw a long breath. His efforts and Dick's to revive the man they had fished out of the lake were successful, for the victim of the disaster whom they had been rolling on the grass showed signs of reviving.

"I didn't work as a kid kneadin' bread in a bakery for nothing," continued Gid, feeling his sore muscles. "It was enough to rouse a dead man, I should think."

Dick was bending over the prostrate man, forcing some brandy between his teeth. The flying ship was hovering in the distance, evidently preparing to go to its quarters, a great warehouse-like building, for the night.

"I guess they've given him up," said Dick, though they could see some boats hurrying back and forth on the lake where their charge had fallen.

"Oh, we can tend to him as well as his friends!" remarked Gid. "Look—if he ain't tryin' to get up!" and the victim of the accident was certainly trying to rise. "We're a fine pair of doctors!" I'll hang out a shingle if the paper business gives out."

"He wants us to carry him over to that house, there," said Dick, unmindful of the other's chatter, for he was inclining his ear to hear what the gentleman was saying.

The house in question was a small villa of two stories, and seemed to communicate with a great shedlike building like a freight depot.

The rescued man told them in what pocket to find the door-key, and they carried him into a small room fitted up like an office, and laid him on a couch in the corner. On the table lay many papers that seemed to be working plans.

The boys, without waiting to be asked, found a closet full of clothes, and in an astonishing short time had removed the man's wet garments and fitted him out dry and comfortable. All this time he had been watching them keenly, but now he spoke:

"So, you young men saved my life, eh?"

"Oh, I suppose if we hadn't done it some one else would," replied Dick, modestly.

"I'm not so sure of that. Anyway, I owe you eternal gratitude. I notice by your voices that you are Americans. So am I. What are you doing here?"

They told him, briefly. He asked many personal questions.

"Well, it was a lucky day for me that your steps led you this way, and as sure as my name is Harwood—"

"What's that!" cried Dick, jumping to his feet. Then, as the gentleman looked surprised, he related their adventure in the woods the night before of the plot they had overheard.

It was Mr. Harwood's turn to be excited now, and he arose and paced up and down the room, nervously.

"It is just as I suspected. I thought it was an accident that

threw me from the flying ship, but now I see that it was a put-up job."

He went to the door and listened attentively, then returned.

"You shall know all about it," he said, as he sat down. "I have built a flying ship on the model of Count Zeppelin's, from which I fell to-day. But mine has other improvements. I know I can trust you and so I'll tell you all. When in Cuba during the war, a dying Spaniard I befriended gave me a chart whereby I could find the wreck of a treasure ship, wedged among the other wrecks in the heart of the Sargasso Sea, known as The Haven of Lost Ships. I'll tell you about that some other time. It seems a soldier in my company who hated me overheard the dying man's words, and afterward made every effort to get hold of the chart. He didn't succeed, and at the end of the war I lost sight of him. Hearing of Count Zeppelin's invention, I came here and purchased the rights to build an air ship on his model."

He paused a moment, went to the closet and poured himself out a glass of wine, which he drank and returned.

"It seems that the soldier who overheard about the treasure organized a syndicate of rascals to find the ship, if possible, before I got to the scene. But as I have the sole rights to the air ship, the one thing he could do was to try and put me out of the business. Twice an effort has been made to burn the ship up, and to-day comes this assault on my life. Young men, you look strong and brave, what do you say. Will you join me on this expedition that will make us all rich?"

For a moment they were too taken aback to answer.

"My life is not safe here," continued Mr. Harwood. "I was waiting for two others to join me, but you young men will do just as well, and we can start without delay. Everything is ready, and it is a case of go, or lose everything. Come, what do you say? There is risk, of course, but then the reward will be enormous. Even if we fail, there is other wealth in that strange sea, and we shall not come back empty handed."

He looked at them eagerly as he spoke, waiting for the answer.

"I don't know what Gid Crossly here means to do," said Dick, who had been listening to Mr. Harwood's story, with flashing eyes, "but I will be glad to go," and he grasped the elder man's hand.

"And you?" to Gid.

The latter squirmed about on his chair, uneasily, looked at Dick and then at the owner of the flying ship. He seemed worried over the question.

"Scared, eh?" said Dick, tauntingly, knowing that was the best way to bring his companion to terms.

"No, I ain't!" replied the other, jumping to his feet. "Hang it all, Dick, you are goin' to count me in, too!" and he gave his hand to Mr. Harwood, and though he felt uncomfortable, he had too much pride to back out.

"Well, that's settled, and I feel that I have two recruits that I can depend on," as Mr. Harwood lit the hanging lamp suspended from the ceiling, for the evening had begun to close in. "I don't think either of you will live to regret it, and you will be made for life."

The prospect of being rich cheered up Gid immensely, and Dick's confidence reassured him.

Mr. Harwood, closing the shutters, came back to them. "You can be ready at midnight?" he asked. "There's a fine air for a start, and we must take advantage of the night to slip away."

"We've only to go to the inn for our knapsacks," said Dick. "We've been carrying our wardrobes on our backs."

"A mighty convenient way, truly," replied the other, smiling. Then he went to a safe in the corner, and opening it, came back with a steel box in his hand, which he opened on the table.

"Thanks to your help, I may escape those rascals. They must know that I was not to start for several days yet. We'll fool them! I won't feel comfortable until we are up in the air on the road to riches. See, here is the chart," and out of the box he lifted a moldy parchment and spread it out on the table.

"Here," he explained, "is Bermuda, and here——" at that moment the sound of a pistol shot rang out and the lamp above was shattered, the broken glass falling on the table. They had just time to see a hand holding a pistol withdrawn from the window, when the light went out.

"After me, boys!" exclaimed Harwood, excitedly. "Some one pried open the shutter and fired!" and he tore open the door and dashed out into the night, followed by the lads.

They made out a shadowy figure running for a group of trees, and though Harwood fired, the pursued ran on, finally disappearing in the woods.

"It's no use," growled the aeronaut, as they paused on the edge of the wood. "We could never find him among those trees," and the trio returned, disconsolately, to the cottage.

"You see, they will stop at nothing! I am leaving here none too soon," said Mr. Harwood, as he brought out another lamp and lit it to replace the one that had been shattered.

As he was setting it on the table he uttered a hoarse cry and nearly let it fall.

"What is it? Are you ill?" asked Dick, for he was pale.

"The chart! The chart! Where is it?" excitedly.

But though they searched high and low, the document that was to guide them to the treasure ship had disappeared!

"It was a trick to steal the chart. I see it now!" exclaimed Harwood, after he had recovered some of his composure. "But, boys, we will go just the same. We will down the rascals yet!"

CHAPTER IV.

AFLOAT IN THE AIR.

"After midnight now!" exclaimed Mr. Harwood, snapping his watch. "Men, to your places!"

It was a strange scene. Filling a long building like a car shed was a gigantic cylinder of a dull gray color, surrounded by a network of ropes resembling a great spider's web. Two big cars depended from this enormous tube, one closed and the other open. In the latter sat Dick and Gid, in company with three others. They were both too much excited to say anything, as they watched the engineer, in charge of the two benzine engines that were to supply the motive power, at his work. The place, faintly lit by a few electric lights, was full of strange shadows. Mr. Harwood, racing up and down, excitedly, was giving his last orders to the men who were to set the structure free. The roof (a rolling one) had been removed, and the calm sky, full of stars, glittered above them.

"It isn't too late for you to back out yet, Gid," said Dick, who saw his companion was shaky.

The other, seeing how calm the three other men in the car were, plucked up courage to say, valiantly:

"I ain't goin' to back out, though we may all have to do that if we should happen to hit a star. Don't you fret about me, cully, but 'tend to your knittin'. Anyway, this may be our only chance to get so near to heaven."

At that moment Mr. Harwood climbed up the rope ladder into the car and then drew the ladder after him.

"Now then, men, cut away!" he called out.

They heard the sound of blows and felt the great ship quivering, like a huge snake, throughout its length. Then the walls and electric lights seemed to sink beneath them.

"We are rising! We're off," exclaimed Dick, and he felt Gid's hand steal into his. A moment more and they felt the cool air of night blowing over their faces, and beyond, the lights of the city of Zurich.

Once afloat, our boys were surprised to find nearly all their nervousness disappear. It seemed so safe to sit under the protecting shadow of the great cylinder that seemed too big for any accident to befall it. Perhaps if they could have looked below they might have become faint, but night hid everything.

"Boys, we have everything in our favor," said Captain Harwood, who was managing the steering gear, now and then consulting a curious instrument at his elbow. "We have got off safe, and left those rogues behind. We couldn't have better weather. Won't they fume and rage when they find how I tricked them!" and he laughed as if it were the best joke in the world.

"But they have the chart," said Dick. "Won't that show them the way to reach the ship?"

"Yes, if they can ever get there. You see, they have a boat, but it can't pierce through the tangle of weeds that fill the sea, so we have them on the hip, and they can sell the chart for a curiosity."

He was in such good spirits that they could not but feel encouraged and cheered up.

"We are passing over the city now," continued the captain, and looking down they saw a soft glow of light.

The boys did not care to look long, for it seemed such a dizzy height that they had reached, so they soon drew back, satisfied.

"Just wait until the morning comes," said Harwood, with enthusiasm. "Then you'll see a sight that few have ever had the privilege of seeing before."

"I wouldn't want to walk in my sleep on this shebang," said Gid, after the head of the expedition had turned to his work. "Ugh! Just think of gettin' spitted on one of those sharp pointed church spires."

"But I don't want to think about such things, and you had better not, either," grumbled Dick. "Try and think of pleasant things. I guess when we get used to the ship we won't feel any more uneasy than if we were on solid ground."

"Yes, but it's the gettin' used to it that's goin' to jar us," replied Gid.

To divert them, Harwood gave up his place to one of his men and took the boys along the long gallery that divided the two cars, to show them the cabin, which they found fitted up with every comfort, and the most ingenious devices to economize space. There were folding bunks that vanished as if by magic, and tables and chairs that flattened out and filled compartments on the floor.

"I can make as many different rooms out of this as a good-sized house if necessary," explained the captain. "Parlor, dining-room, bedroom, what you will, just a few turns of the hand," and the boys lost much of their uneasiness in hearing his explanations.

They would have been glad to hear more if Harwood had not suddenly exclaimed:

"Why, that sounds like rain!" and he looked out on the night through one of the glass bull's-eyes that served for a window to the cabin. He had hardly uttered this remark when they heard a tremendous roll of thunder.

"I wish you'd steer a little further away from that bowling alley," remarked Gid, "it's likely to keep me awake."

But the captain's face was troubled, and he did not heed the jest.

"This is bad," his manner betraying nervousness. "A storm at night I don't like, and the weather promised so well. We must manage to descend, I don't want to risk it the first day."

Gid looked at Dick, gravely; they were beginning to share the captain's anxiety.

A silence followed, in which no one spoke. Then came a blinding flash of lightning that seemed to set the air on fire outside, while at the same time the ship rocked and almost threw them down as they stood in the center of the cabin.

"Be calm, it's nothing!" said Harwood, though his face was pale.

The boys were both frightened, and Gid clung to his companion, as one drowning to a lifebuoy.

"Nothing serious can have happened. I have foreseen everything," continued Harwood. "You young men remain here while I go and see what has happened," and he moved toward the door leading to the gallery. He had hardly reached this door when it was flung violently open and a pale-faced man rushed in.

"Captain Harwood!" he gasped. "That lightning struck the ship and she is in flames!"

CHAPTER V.

DICK'S PERIL.

The man who had brought the terrible news that the flying ship had been struck by lightning and was in flames, without waiting ran back over the gallery that communicated with the other car. For a moment the three in the cabin said not a word.

Captain Harwood seemed to be paralyzed by the intelligence, and had sunk back on the cushions wringing his hands perfectly panic-stricken.

Gid Crossly, a huddled-up bundle in the corner, was muttering unintelligible sounds as if bereft of his reason.

"Was ever man so cursed?" moaned Harwood. "All my fortune is in this ship. I shall lose everything."

Dick Henslow was surprised to see him so overcome; but then the excitement of the past few days, the thought that he was a marked man who might any hour be killed, his fall from the flying ship, all had conspired to undermine a strong and rugged nature.

"Come, this won't do!" exclaimed Dick, shaking him vigorously by the arm, for he did not propose to get killed without some fight for his life. "You said you were prepared for anything that might happen. Shall we sit here and moan while we are being hurled to destruction. There must be something we can do, and we cannot act too soon. Stir yourself, Captain Harwood, for Heaven's sake!"

Dick's eager voice seemed to rouse the other up.

"You're right, I am acting like a child. At least we can bring the ship down, for in this upper air the fire will make more rapid progress. The only trouble is that in this black night there is no telling where we may land."

"Better risk that than let the ship be burnt up in midair."

"You are right. Come, and we will see what we can do," and he dashed out of the cabin with our hero close at his heels.

They made their way along the gallery that divided the two cars slowly, for in that exposed position the wind had full sweep, and they stood a good chance of being blown over the slight railing into the gloomy abyss below.

When they reached the open car, they found the men huddled up on the floor, crouching out of reach of the wind and rain. They seemed one and all to have resigned themselves to their fate.

"Up with you all—you lubbers!" cried Captain Harwood, giving the nearest man a vigorous kick. "What do ye mean by skulking?"

He seemed to have recovered his presence of mind.

"There ain't nuthin' to be done," said the man who had received his boot. "Curse you and your ship, anyway!"

"What do you mean that there's nothing to be done? We can descend."

"We tried it. There's something the matter with the water ballast. All we can do is to lay here and wait till she burns us. Then we'll descend, don't be alarmed about that," and he sank back in his hopeless position on the floor.

"Good God! It's worse than I expected. Even that hope is taken from us!" cried Harwood, pacing up and down the narrow confines of the car, giving little heed whether he walked over the members of the crew or not.

"If it only were daylight something might be done," he groaned.

"The fire don't seem to have made much headway," said Dick, who had clambered out on a little bridge that projected from the car, and now returned. "I saw a faint glow, but there seemed no blaze to speak of. It would have shown out in this blackness."

"I suppose one of the seventeen balloons is blazing, but the fire will soon reach the rest," replied Harwood, who refused to be comforted. "I had some hopes that the rain would have helped, or at least delayed the catastrophe, but even that has stopped," bitterly.

"If we could only reach that fire and put it out."

"There is a way, but it is too risky to attempt. These lubbers here"—pointing to the three men—"would rather skulk than risk anything to save their precious necks."

"Explain yourself."

"This fire, I believe, is confined now to one of the balloons."

"Yes."

"There are seventeen rope ladders on each side of the ship leading to them. If a man could mount the right ladder with a hose, he could put out the fire."

"But the water—the water?" exclaimed Dick, to whom the possibility of escape from the danger gave hope and cheer.

"The water ballast—it runs in a tank the full length of the ship's four hundred feet. By connecting a hose with that we could have enough water to put a blazing ship out. There's a hand pump to lift the water. But what's the use of talking. What can you do with such stuff as this"—pointing to the three men—"and as for myself, since that drop in the lake, I could never get halfway up the ladder with my rheumatic joints. No, all we can hope for is that the ship will keep up until daylight, and then we may find a chance to descend."

"And in the meantime the fire is spreading to the other balloons."

"Exactly," shrugging his shoulders, as if he were getting as hopeless as the members of the crew.

Dick went up to him and laid his hand on the captain's shoulder.

"Captain Harwood," in a firm voice, "make the connection and I will carry the hose up the ladder. You can manage the pump!"

"What, you, my boy?" turning in astonishment.

"Yes; while something can be done to save us I am not going to stand idle."

He left the captain's side for a moment, and ran out on the projecting bridge. He was back again in a moment.

"Quick!" striking Harwood on the shoulder. "It is spreading, I can see the glow above has brightened. Courage and all will be well!"

His words seemed to put new life into the hopeless man. He ran to a locker set in the side of the car, and hauled out a long hose, affixing one end to a plug in the floor, then uncoiled the tube and gave the nozzle into Dick's hand.

"You have located the fire. You know what ladder to mount.

Go, my boy, and God bless you, the lives of us all are in your keeping!" and he pressed our hero's hand, with tears in his voice.

Dick snatched a lantern, and telling the captain to hold the hose, and when he felt a tug to turn on the water and pump, he mounted the ladder that he thought would bring him nearest to the fire.

"A brave fellow!" muttered the captain, as the slight figure disappeared in the shadows. "With a crew made up of such as he, the conquest of the air would be child's play."

Up and down the narrow limits of the car he paced, nervously, unable to keep still, hoping, fearing everything!

It was no easy task to mount that frail ladder in such a wind as then was raging. To make matters worse, Dick had the lantern and the hose to drag after him, but the thought of the five lives he might save nerved him to toil upward with unwavering hope.

At nearly every rung of the swaying ladder he had to stop for breath, for the fierce wind made it difficult to fill his lungs.

He set his teeth hard, and struggled upward, for now he could see more clearly the glowing fire above him.

He reached the top of the ladder. He saw where the lightning had torn its way into the heart of the ship, setting fire to one of the balloons. Fortunately the flames blew upward, and away from him, though now and then a gust of air swept the smoke down in his face, almost choking him into insensibility.

He wound his legs about the ladder, affixed the lantern to the netting, and gave the signal to pump.

Even in that perilous position he could hardly resist a yell of delight as the water shot out of the nozzle toward the flames. If he had been standing on solid earth he would have danced for joy at his success.

Under that steady stream the flames gradually grew less and less, finally dying out.

He sent a last watery shot into the now black interior, and then gave the pipe a tug to cease pumping.

Then he felt a great weakness come over him, as he turned to descend; for now that the excitement was mostly over, nature was having her revenge. But what mattered anything now? The hose fell from his nerveless hands, the lantern dropped like a tiny meteor through the darkness.

Dizzy, choked with the smoke he had breathed, he groped his way down the ladder. Then everything became hazy before him, and he made a misstep and fell.

CHAPTER VI.

FROM THE CLOUDS TO EARTH.

Captain Harwood, with anxious face, stood by the pump, one hand holding the hose, waiting for the signal which he feared would never come. He had taken a great liking to Dick Henslow, and the brave way in which the lad went to face almost certain death further endeared him to him.

"If he and we ever come out of this alive he shall be as a son to me," was a fixed resolve in Harwood's mind in that hour of peril. Our hero had told him he was an orphan.

As time passed and the hoped for signal did not come, he grew sick at heart, and heaped bitter maledictions on the three men of the crew, who had now roused themselves sufficiently to take some interest in the proceedings.

"Cowards all!" he cried. "You let a boy do what you measly hounds were too timid to do yourselves. There'll be little loss to the world if you all are smashed."

"None o' that, cap!" cried a big fellow named Siggins, in a rough pea jacket, and his red face wore an angry look. "You didn't tell me I'd stack up against a danger like this. You put

out all sorts of lyin' hopes; so, keep a civil tongue. There's no captain here now, and you might get pitched overboard, and be the first to hit the earth."

"You're very brave now with your threats," sneered Harwood. "I'll tend to you later, my man," then he broke off and uttered a yell of delight. "The signal! The signal!" he felt a tug at the pipe. "He's reached the top, by the grace of God!" and with trembling hands he fell to pumping with a will, while tears coursed down his cheeks.

It was astonishing to see how the three men, who but a moment ago had sunk into a lethargy of despair, awoke when they heard that our hero had reached the top of the ladder, and that the water must now be at work on the fire.

They even sent up a ringing cheer, and acted like men suddenly roused from a sound sleep, refreshed and eager to be doing.

"Aye, cheer, ye lubbers!" cried Captain Harwood, scornfully. "Cheer, and take off your hats to one who is a better man than you all put together!"

But the captain's jibes were passed unnoticed, they were all too much occupied with thinking of the pleasant prospect of escaping, for in their hearts they never thought a mere lad could have accomplished such a feat in the teeth of the gale.

From being sullen, morose, and despairing, they grew cheerful and confident, and hustled about helping the captain at the pump, bustling here and there making work for themselves.

Captain Harwood was not sorry to be relieved of his work, and stood with his hand on the hose near the edge of the car, still anxious regarding his *protégé*.

What a relief it was when, after what seemed hours, he felt the signal, "Stop pumping."

He felt light-hearted enough even to have embraced his men, whom he had been abusing but a few minutes before.

"Boys, if you ever say your prayers, put in a word for the lad who has brought us through peril to-night. Without him we should be senseless clods."

Had Captain Harwood turned while delivering this speech, he would have caught a fleeting glimpse of a falling body dashing past the car into the blackness below.

As time passed the cheerful look on his face gave place to gloom. He hardly heeded when one of his men came to him and told him that they had found the trouble with the ballast, and now might descend if he so pleased.

He was standing by the edge of the car, waiting to see Dick's face again, and knew from the delay that something terrible might happen.

He was aroused from his reverie by feeling a timid touch on his arm. He turned and faced Gid Crossly.

He had forgotten all about the boy since he left the cabin when the news of the ship being on fire reached him. He would have made an angry remark, if he had not seen that the lad looked pale, and that his shrewd, freckled face was pinched and careworn.

"Well, my boy," not unkindly, "you will not leave the land of the living just yet. So far we are safe, if nothing fresh occurs."

"And Dick?"

"We owe it all to Dick that we are alive," in a choking voice.

"What makes you speak that way?"

"The ship was on fire. He climbed up and put it out at the risk of his life."

"And where is he now?" insisted the little fellow, and he looked about the car anxiously in search of his friend.

Captain Harwood told him as gently as he could what had taken

place. That though Dick had succeeded in putting out the fire, he had not descended again.

"But he might be up there yet," said Gid, whose face wrinkled up as if he was ready to burst into tears.

"It is half an hour since he gave the signal to stop pumping."

"Oh laws! then you think——?"

"I'm afraid that, weakened by the exertion, he slipped coming down."

"I'll see about that," grunted Gid, "I won't believe it until I see for myself," and he made a dash for the ladder, if the captain had not held him back.

"There is no use—no use," said the latter sadly, "I know that if he had been spared he would have been with us now."

It had been many a day since Gid had given vent to tears, but he saw the force of the captain's reasoning, and retreating to a corner of the car sniveled in silence. He had a scorn naturally of a cry baby, but the loss of his dearest friend touched him too deeply and so he indulged in a good cry.

The members of the crew were too much delighted over their escape to mourn much over the loss of the young fellow, whom they had only seen a few minutes before they started on the voyage. They proceeded cheerfully about their work unmindful of the captain's frown, for it angered him to see how calmly they took the loss of Dick.

The morning had begun to break, and the sun cast a cheerful glow over the green fields and the towns below.

Though bowed down with sorrow Captain Harwood gave orders for breakfast, but sat off in moody silence, eating nothing.

After the meal was over they passed over a large body of water, and owing to the burning up of they knew not how many balloons that made up the lifting power of the machine, they were not more than fifty feet above the surface.

As soon as they passed over a large field Captain Harwood gave the order to descend, and never was an order obeyed with greater alacrity.

The ship obeyed admirably, and they sank down on a new ploughed field as softly as a bird might rest there.

They clambered out with a wild hurrah over their emancipation, and went to work driving pegs and arranging for the anchorage of the ship. They would never have been recognized as the same sullen creatures who crouched in the bottom of the car the night before, when the ship was in danger.

Captain Harwood examined the ship carefully to see what damage the storm had wrought. He had even a faint hope that perhaps Dick might have got caught in the rigging, but was soon compelled to give up that idea.

"A few hours and we can make her all right again," he said to the engineer. "Two of the balloons burned out and a big tear in the cover. We have the things to repair within the lockers."

One thing they had lost that could never be made up for—the loss of Dick Henslow.

He had only seen the engineer by night since they started, and now he looked at the latter's smudgy face in surprise.

"Why, you are not Griggs—how came you in the ship?" he asked.

"Griggs was took ill at the last minute, and so he sent me in his place, sir," said the other, awkwardly. He was a thin, wiry man with a hatchet-shaped face and keen, beady eyes.

"Well, I like that! Sending a new man in his place to wreck us all if the storm had not come near doing it."

"Bless ye, sir, I worked in Count Zeppelin's shops and know all about the benzine engines. He know'd I'd do just as well, and bein' of your own land you wouldn't be likely to turn me out."

The captain continued to eye him keenly.

"And what is your name?"

"Job Hendricks, and if you don't want me, why of course I can go," and he turned away.

"Stay where you are. Of course I want you, though I don't like this method of proceeding. If you worked for the Count you know your business. I must hold on to you any way. Can't be left here without an engineer, or we shall never get off. You can stay."

"Thank ye kindly," pulling his forelock, for his hat was in his hand.

"You want to continue with the expedition?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, then, don't act like such a child as you did last night."

The engineer bowed, but said nothing and then slunk away.

Though it pleased Captain Harwood to think that his ship, in which he had invested his fortune, had suffered little damage, he still worried over Dick. The craven behavior of the men made the lad's courage stand out in a more conspicuous light.

"He was worth them all put together," was the thought in his mind. "With him at my side the expedition would have been victorious."

"This way, cap, if you please," called out a voice.

It was that of Bill Siggins, one of the crew, a man he had picked up at Zurich and engaged because he was an American, had been a sailor and ready for anything.

Bill was standing looking at some object at his feet.

As the captain came up he saw that it was one of the anchors of the flying ship.

"This anchor and a good bit of rope must have been trailing," said Siggins, "and jest look at this what I picked off it," at the same time holding out a ragged piece of cloth.

Harwood took it in his hand and then started back.

"It must be that the poor fellow in his fall caught the anchor and this piece of cloth was ripped from his coat," said the captain, musingly, "for I remember that poor Dick Henslow wore a coat made of cloth just like this. Ah me! I would give a good deal to see him standing before me alive and well."

"Put up cap, for here he is!" cried a voice, and they turned to see a bedraggled water-soaked figure coming toward them, limping and yet laughing.

It was indeed Dick Henslow.

CHAPTER VII.

WRECK AHoy!

"Oh, I'm not a ghost, though I came near becoming one," as Harwood started, and then gave him a hug that was not wanting in warmth.

"I feel like a drowned rat, and would be glad of a change of clothes immediately, if not sooner."

He was glad enough over his escape, and to see the captain again.

As for Gid, he gave vent to his feelings by a series of whoops that must have made the natives, if there were any about, imagine an Indian invasion.

"I suppose you are a bit surprised to have me drop in," said Dick. "It was a close shave," shaking his head.

"You can tell us about that later," interposed Harwood, hastily. "Now to get you into dry togs."

Dick was the hero of the hour, the men vying with each other to be of service. He was offered his pick from the wardrobes of all hands. Was rubbed with alcohol, fed with the best the ship afforded, and almost swamped by steaming beverages.

After a restful sleep, during which the captain and his men

repaired the ravages of the fire, Dick showed few signs of all he had passed through.

Then they were all eager to learn how he had escaped.

"It was a strange thing, but mighty simple when you come down to dots," said he. "I guess this child is not to lose his life by lofty tumbling from the skies. You know after I gave the signal to stop the pump, I slipped on the way down."

Gid Crossly uttered a whimper.

"Well, you are a nervy chap an' no mistake," said he.

"Well, I'll tell you that just then I felt as if I didn't care what happened. Too much done up to care. Kind o' glad to leave that old ladder I'd got sick of holding on to. Suddenly I brought up with a jerk. I'd struck the trailing anchor, though, of course, I didn't know it at the time. Wasn't much interested either, for that matter."

"Well, what then?" asked Harwood.

"That's all I remember, for then I lost consciousness. When I came to it was morning, and as I turned to see where I was at, rip! went my coat, and I plumped down into a lake, just as you were passing over it. Swam ashore and here I am."

"And mighty glad we all are to have you back," and Harwood grasped his hand warmly. "I guess you have been spared for some worthy purpose."

Half an hour later and the flying ship arose like a bird from the field and was speeding into France.

Dick was called into the cabin, where he found Harwood poring over some maps on the table.

"Sit down," he said. "I must explain to you how I propose to reach our destination, for if anything was to happen to me, you might continue the expedition."

"Don't speak of such a thing. Let's hope we've been through the worst, and that the rest of the trip will be smooth sailing."

"You can never tell what might happen, so it is well to be prepared for an emergency."

"Tell me about this mysterious sea—The Sargasso Sea," put in the young man. "I know mighty little about it."

"No one knows much. It's rather an unexplored country, though as big as the Continent of Europe, lying southeast of Cuba and north of Bermuda. Looks like a great meadow, as it's packed with dense seaweed that makes navigation impossible. Whatever sweeps into it is held in the tangle; wrecks, cargoes, nothing ever get out."

"I hope we'll get out, when we are ready to escape," said Dick with a smile, immensely interested in the strange sea—the mysterious Haven of Lost Ships.

"No fear of that with the flying ship. If that other expedition expects to reach there by boat they'll be beautifully fooled, though a steamer, I suppose, could be constructed so as to cut its way in, I don't think they've had time to build one. Hope not. It would really be too bad to get there and find the golden galleon looted. I'm not so greedy for wealth as I am eager to beat that rogue Phil Wilkins and keep him out of the treasure. Here, you see, is our course," pointing to the map. "We cross France and Spain and then hit the North Atlantic. Then the way is clear to the Sargasso Sea, and I hope to the treasure of the Spaniard."

Long into the night they sat there talking over plans. The evening was calm, and the weather perfect, and the uneasiness each felt after the experience with the fire gradually wore away.

As the days passed, and nothing happened to mar the trip, the boys began to take a keen interest in the passage. The swift motion through the air produced a certain exhilaration, such as people experience on the tops of lofty mountains. It was not so pleasant when they soared to a great height, for then the heart beat very fast and there was a feeling of oppression.

Captain Harwood preferred to keep at a moderate height from the earth, so as to avoid the dangerous currents of the upper air. The second day, after they had reached the North Atlantic, they were startled by the lookout calling out:

"A wreck! A wreck!"

Not having seen any craft for some hours, they all crowded about the edge of the open car. Every available glass that could be mustered out was in use. It was a gray, cold day, and the waves below, as they skimmed along, were running high.

There was no doubt that it was a wreck, for one of the masts was hanging over the side, and the waves were dashing over the bows.

"Is there anything more melancholy than a deserted wreck," exclaimed Captain Harwood.

"But are you sure she is deserted?" asked Dick.

"Why, no crew would remain on such a boat."

"I think I see something moving about in the shadow of the forecabin," said our hero.

"Give me your glass," and as the captain took it he uttered an exclamation. "By the Lord Harry! we must look into this, for I do see something moving about." He turned and gave some orders to the engineer.

"What do you mean to do?" asked that worthy, a little sullenly.

"If there's a human being on that wreck, rescue them," was the prompt reply, which drew forth some murmurs from the crew.

"We'll be swamped, if we go near her," growled Bill Siggins.

"Obey orders!" replied the other, sternly, and they began to discharge ballast. The flying ship was brought about, and floated on the top of the waves. It required fine manipulation to bring the great structure near to the wreck.

"Out with the life raft," ordered Harwood, and this was done amid very pronounced grumbles from the men.

"Any volunteers?" called the captain. Bill Siggins made a motion forward, but the engineer pulled him back, after saying something to him in a low voice.

"I see you are as brave as ever!" contemptuously. "Very good! I'll go alone."

"I guess not," replied Dick. "I'll go to keep you company."

"And I'll go to see no harm comes to Dick," piped the shrill voice of Gid. "Ain't goin' to let you get out of my sight, old pard," he said bravely, and jumped on to the raft.

Harwood would have spared Dick, but he saw his heart was set on going, and it would be useless to keep him back.

"Don't let any one harm you men while we are gone," said Captain Harwood with a sneer directed at the crew now watching him in sullen silence. Then the raft swept away, in a whirl of gray water towards the wreck.

CHAPTER VIII.

AT THE SEA'S MERCY.

"I wonder if we did well to go off and leave those men there," said Dick, as he turned to look back at the *King of the Air* resting like a huge snake on the gray water.

"Oh, no great harm done, I fancy," was the rejoinder. "But I don't see anything living on the deck," straining his eyes toward the wreck. The raft, a patent arrangement, he had purchased in France, rode the waves like a stormy petrel, and but for the wetting they felt perfectly safe.

"It might have been a dog," Dick said. "It was so far off, that I could not make out what it was."

"Fancy the feelings of any one left on such a hulk, for she looks as if she had been floating in that shape for some days."

"How are we going to get on board without a smash up," for it was dangerous to approach the great reeling vessel.

"Well, you see the bow is submerged in one place; we can float aboard if we act adroitly," returned Harwood, who grasped the situation intelligently.

A nasty sea was running, and it required the united efforts of all three to keep from being smashed against the sides of the ship.

"Not a living soul in sight," muttered Dick, who had a clear view of the deck when for a moment they rode the crest of a wave.

"The poor devil might have been washed off while we were on our way to rescue him."

"Yes, or thrown down and injured."

"I'm going to be very certain if there is any one there," said the captain. "I'd never forgive myself if I turned tail and left a poor wail to perish."

"The whole outfit may go down," grumbled Gid, who was cold, with chattering teeth, and did not enjoy the expedition quite as much as he had expected. "This here heroic business ain't what it's cracked up to be, I don't think."

"You're never satisfied, Gid," laughed his friend. "Just put yourself in that chap's place."

"Thank ye, but I'm not hankerin' to do anything of the kind. Ugh! What a dismal lookin' thing that is," with a shudder, for the wreck with its broken mast, and trailing sail, its sloppy deck, presented a dismal spectacle.

They could not see any one on the deck, which rather surprised the captain and Dick, for they were sure they had seen something living. They were not going away, though, until perfectly satisfied. Dick, who was steering, managed to bring the raft about, so that they were under the ship's lee, where the force of the waves did not break over them with such violence.

From the appearance of the sunken bow the ship was stove in, and would possibly have sunk if she had not been loaded with lumber, or some cargo that helped her to float.

Waiting for a good sized wave, Dick, with Gid's help, sent the raft up over the partly submerged bow, and then making a leap with a line, dragged the raft forward before the retreating waters could drag it back.

"Well done!" exclaimed Captain Harwood, as he jumped off on the deck holding his companion by the hand.

"My, wouldn't this draw a crowd in a Bowery drama," said Gid, looking around him in astonishment.

Dick, who had run up to the door of the cabin, peered in and then ran back with a white face.

"What's the trouble?" asked Harwood.

"There's a dead man there!"

The former went into the dim lit place, and found a sailor on the floor in a huddled up position.

"This man has been dead some days," said the captain. "Fallen and broken his neck," after a brief examination.

"Then it could not have been him that we saw or thought we saw moving about the deck."

"Impossible! Still there may be others," moving here and there about the cabin. "I don't see any other human being living or dead."

It was a grewsome task examining the premises, for they knew not what startling revelations that gloomy place might disclose.

Suddenly both started, and looked at each other in alarm.

"Is that the rising wind—that whining sound?" asked the captain, for a plaintive noise reached them, that sounded very weird.

"Not the wind, that is certain," murmured Dick.

Gid had gone out on the deck, unable to stand the horrors of the place.

The sighing sound arose almost to a wail. It was like the mourning sound of a troubled spirit, and, though they were not superstitious, heard on the wreck, it made them shiver.

"It sounds like a woman's," added Dick. "But that don't seem possible."

"We shall know for certain," and, so saying, the captain made a dash toward a door at the end of the cabin, and threw it open. The sound was louder now. There was no mistaking that the voice was a woman's. And singing softly in such a place at such a time! Harwood walked into the room, which was dimly lit. He was gone some minutes, while Dick lingered on the threshold.

Presently the captain came out, bearing a limp figure in his arms. It was a young girl, perhaps sixteen years old. Her eyes were closed, her face a frozen white, while her dark, loosened hair almost covered her like a mantle.

The captain carried her outside, and dashed some of the sea water over her, for she was breathing heavy, though very exhausted. Her clothes, bedraggled, and soiled, were wet, as if she had been in the water. They worked over her silently, and at last had the satisfaction of seeing her open her eyes and look about her in a startled way. There was a wild expression in her dark eyes that showed her mind must be wandering—that the horrors of the situation had affected her brain.

It was just then that Gid suddenly cried out in his piping voice:

"Look at the flying ship! Look at her!"

They turned, to see the *King of the Air* rise from the surface of the sea, describe a circle, and then, with a majestic sweep, soar away toward the west!

CHAPTER IX.

WHAT HAPPENED ON THE WRECK.

"Deserted! Left to perish on this hulk!" cried Captain Harwood, hardly willing to believe that the flying ship had left them to their fate.

They watched the great ship grow gradually smaller in size, until it became a mere speck on the edge of the horizon, and then vanished entirely in a fog that was rising over the gray waters.

"Don't give up all hope, captain," said Dick Henslow, affecting a cheeriness which he was far from feeling. "You see, a storm is coming up, and it may be they thought it best to try and find some shelter. They may come back for us when the weather clears."

Captain Harwood laughed bitterly.

"No fear of that! The rascals have gone for good. Even if they do come back, they would have small chance of finding us here, for I doubt if this wreck could ever weather another storm. No, no, my boy, they have gone, and we are deserted, and we may as well make the best of it, or, rather, the worst."

Dick could not but see that he took a right view of the matter, but he had the courage and hope of youth, and was not going to let despair get the better of him.

They certainly were in a deplorable position, deserted in mid-ocean, with a storm coming up.

"And the young girl—what of her?" he said to Harwood, for in the excitement of the moment they had forgotten all about the poor creature they had come to rescue.

"You're right. We must look after her, no matter what happens," and the captain hurried back toward the fore cabin, where he had left the girl before the disappearance of the flying ship had driven all other thoughts from their minds.

They found that she had relapsed again into unconsciousness. But the captain's feelings of humanity, now fully aroused at the sight of her face, he forgot for the time the desperate predicament of himself and his companions, and with true fatherly tenderness did everything to make her comfortable.

He made her up a couch in the cabin, fished out a bottle of spirits and some biscuits from a locker, and, after half an hour's labor, had the satisfaction of seeing her sit up and look around her in a frightened way.

"Don't be alarmed; you are among friends, my child," said Harwood, in a kindly voice; and he proceeded to tell her how they had seen something moving on the wreck, and had come to the rescue, only to be deserted by the crew of the flying ship.

Still in a dazed condition, it was necessary to go over the brief story several times before she could be made to understand. But, though she had evidently passed through great suffering, her youth came to the rescue, and after Harwood had forced her to take some of the biscuits and a sip or two of the spirits, some intelligence returned to her frightened eyes, and she lost much of the distracted look her features wore when they first saw her.

"Now, if you are able to tell us how you came to be here alone on the hulk," said the captain, after she had recovered somewhat. "What is this boat—what name—and where does it hail from?"

"The *Morning Star*, of Philadelphia, on its way to Lisbon, with a cargo of oil; James Welford, master. I am his daughter, Mary," and then she covered her face with her hands, as if the recital were too painful to continue.

They waited until she had recovered.

"A few nights ago—I don't know how many; it seems years," she went on, "we were called on deck in the middle of the night. The ship had struck a rock, or a piece of wreck. The boats were manned, the *Star* was deserted. I was in the boat with my father and the first mate and others. As we pushed off, a great wave drove us against the sides of the ship. It stove the boat in, and the next thing I knew we were struggling in the water. I lost my senses, and then when I came to I was lying out there on the deck."

"I see," nodded Captain Harwood. "A wave must have carried you back on the wreck again."

"That must have been the way of it."

"And of the other boats?"

"I'm afraid they all went down," sadly. "Since I came to on the deck I suppose I have been a little out of my mind, for I can't remember anything clearly until I opened my eyes and you were dashing water in my face."

"Poor child! Poor child!" murmured Captain Harwood. "Well, be comforted, for your father may have been picked up by the other boats. They may have been driven away in the storm. We won't give up hope yet, and now you had best take a little rest, while we see what can be done to keep this boat afloat until help arrives."

The girl had sunk back, and was asleep almost before he had finished talking.

"Come with me, Dick," making a sign to our hero, and they went softly out of the cabin together.

"Do you think there is any chance of her finding her father again?" asked Dick, when they were alone.

Captain Harwood shook his head gloomily.

"The faintest chance in the world, though things quite as curious have happened. I said that merely to comfort the poor thing!"

Gid Crossly was hovering about, with a doleful look on his face.

"Give that lad something to do; it will prevent him from think-

ing about our deserted condition," said the captain, in a low voice.

"Right!" replied Dick. "Here, Gid, if you want to help, you can go rooting for eatables. I dare say when the captain's daughter wakes up she can help you. We must eat, I suppose, if we are up against it."

"All right!" exclaimed the boy, as he ran into the cabin, eager to have something to occupy his mind, and to get away from looking at the angry sea.

"We'll have to wait until this storm is over before we try to do anything," said Harwood, pointing to the threatening sky.

"When the storm is over, it may be all over with us."

"True; but this boat seems sturdy yet."

"Do you know what I think? That some of the barrels of oil may have sprung a leak, and that has calmed the waters about her some. You know how oil acts on the waves in the worst sea," said Dick.

"I never thought of that, and I believe you are right," and Harwood seemed mightily pleased at the idea. "Hello! What are you up to now?" for Dick suddenly left his side and ran down toward the stern of the boat in the direction of a sheet-iron structure whose door stood open. He disappeared inside, and was back again before the captain had ceased to wonder over his strange behavior.

"I've found 'em," he said, cheerily.

"Found what?"

"A dozen or more barrels of oil in yonder shed. I suppose the ship was overloaded, and they had to put some of the cargo on deck. Now, if there's any good in oil in a storm, we've enough to float in, and make things about us as clam as a mill pond."

"Well, I didn't make any mistake in bringing you along with me, Dick Henslow!" exclaimed the captain, with enthusiasm, for he grasped the idea at once.

"We must get the barrels out, and rig them up before the storm begins," said Dick, eagerly, "for in a little while it may be too late," casting an anxious look up at the dirty sky.

They rolled the barrels out, one by one, and made them secure in various parts of the deck. Small holes were bored in each one, so that the oil would drip down the sides of the wreck into the sea.

"Eureka!" cried Dick. "It's getting in its work already," and certainly the wreck became steadier, though the waves outside had grown in size.

The sunken bow, that had apparently been stove in, they could do nothing with, but the leak there, or hole, could not have been serious, or the *Morning Star* would not have weathered the waves so long without going down.

They had just finished their hard labors, when the storm broke in all its fury.

"None too soon!" remarked the captain, grimly, as he looked at the black sky, now and then lit up with jagged flashes of lightning. "We have done what we could; we must leave our fate in the keeping of Him who rules the waters."

They were glad enough to get into the cabin again. Mary Welford had lit two of the hanging lamps, had dressed herself in a fresh frock, and had spread the table with a white cloth. Pale and haggard from her recent experiences, she had a sweet face, and welcomed them with a sad smile.

"I know you have been hard at work, and should eat something," she said. "Your young friend here," pointing to Gid, "has managed to reach what's left of the ship's stores, and, though it's all tinned stuff, I guess you'll welcome it."

"Well, rather," remarked Dick, as, without further ado, he

drew up to the table. "I'm hungry enough to eat the tins, let alone what's in 'em," and he helped himself liberally to the canned beef and sardines.

She had managed to get the oil-stove alight, and made them a cup of tea, which was, perhaps, the most welcome part of the meal, after being drenched in the spray. If it was not a merry party that partook of the repast, at least they were not altogether in cheerless mood.

The cabin looked so cosy that it was hard to believe that only a few yards away was a hungry sea, eager to make them its prey, and battering at the walls of their floating prison.

Mary Welford showed them where they could find dry clothes in a locker in the next cabin, and, when they had made a change, and the captain was supplied with a pipe and tobacco from the stores, he looked about as comfortable as any man could in a similar position. A search for nautical instruments and charts which might show them their location was unavailing. They must have been carried away when the captain and the crew took to the boats.

"I don't know as they would be of much use if we had them," said Harwood, "for this wreck is unmanageable, and we can only trust to Providence to see us out of the trouble."

Not a word did he say about the loss of the flying ship, which had cost him so much, and the others took care not to mention the subject in his hearing.

As they evening wore away (and they had no means of judging the time), no one thought of sleep, though they dozed, from sheer weariness. The howling of the wind and the roar of the waves without made continuous sleep impossible.

"It must be near the morning," said Dick, who had been watching for the first signs of daylight, and thought it was getting lighter without, as he peered through one of the cabin windows.

"Then it is time we were up and doing," was the captain's answer, as he got up and gave himself a shake. "Come, Dick, we have weathered the night, and we have work before us."

Just as he said this, a terrible grinding sound was heard, the crash of planks being splintered, and then a tremendous wave burst open the cabin door, throwing down Dick and the captain and flooding the floor with green water.

CHAPTER X.

DESERTING THE MORNING STAR.

"We've struck a rock! There's no mistaking that sound and jar!" exclaimed Captain Harwood, as he struggled to his feet.

The water that had invaded the cabin had retreated, leaving only a few puddles on the floor as a reminder of its visit.

"Calm yourself," said Harwood to Mary Welford. "If we have struck a reef, it may be all the better for us, for it may hold the wreck as firm as if she were anchored. Come, Dick, we may as well know the worst as soon as possible," and he led the way through the open door of the cabin, that the wave had burst open.

The morning was breaking when they found themselves on the deck. Harwood was certainly right in believing that they had struck a rock, for they could hear a grinding sound from below, as if some hidden reef were slowly biting into the keel of the ship.

They seemed to be surrounded on all sides by whirls of foam, and a dense fog, growing each moment to a golden haze, showed that the sun was trying to pierce it.

"Well," asked Dick, looking at the captain, for their position was not promising, "what is to be done?"

The latter shook his head.

"I only wish I could suggest a way out of the trouble. After all, we were better afloat, for we might in the morning have rigged up a jury mast and have kept afloat until we made some port or had fallen in the way of a passing ship."

"And, from the sound, we shall be ground to pieces on the rocks," muttered Dick, with a shiver.

"Yes; we can't hold out long with those rocky teeth at work. Still, we have the raft that brought us here to fall back on. It's rather light to sustain four people, but we can't be choosers."

The raft mentioned was afloat in the water near the sunken bow, just as Dick had left it, hitched by a long line to a ring bolt in the deck.

"We must get away before she begins to break up," continued Harwood. "Go and tell the others, and speak as hopefully as you can, though the Lord knows we have little hope to go on. Let them bring out all the food they can lay hands on, and a few clothes," and, as Dick dashed back into the cabin to carry the unpleasant tidings, the captain pulled in the raft, and began to examine it carefully, to see if the last night's storm had damaged it any.

Whatever Dick told Gid and Mary, it must have been of a cheerful nature, for they did not look at all frightened as they issued from the cabin, bearing bags of provisions, blankets, and clothes that would be of use.

Mary Welford, indeed, seemed pleased at the prospect of leaving the hulk where she had passed through such horrors, and Gid, who evidently did not realize the situation, was equally pleased at the prospect of a change.

Captain Harwood examined the things they had brought out critically, throwing out everything that he thought they could do without, and which would only weight the raft down.

An empty cask was procured, and the goods were placed therein, the top being covered with a piece of oilcloth fastened down. It was then lashed firmly to the floor grating at the end of the raft.

"Hurry, now—hurry!" cried Harwood, as a mighty grinding sound shook the wreck. "Another shock like that, and she will go to pieces!"

Mary was helped on board first, and then Gid, while the captain and Dick remained to make the last preparations for their departure.

They waited until an unusually large wave swept over the deck; then, as it was receding, Dick jumped aboard, and the captain, loosening the line, followed, and they swept off the deck on the waters of the receding wave.

"Stand by, to pole her off from the ship!" yelled Harwood, for they were in danger of being smashed against the hull.

"Aye, aye, sir!"

A moment later, in a whirl of water, they swept past the stern of the *Morning Star*, and the mist hid the fated ship from their gaze. Once the danger of a collision with the ship was averted, Dick drew in his big oar, and looked at the captain.

"What now?" he asked.

"Little it matters, since we have no compass or chart to steer by. We may as well drift about, and save our strength, for we don't know where we are. The only thing we can do is to keep her head to the waves, and trust to Providence."

"A good thing that the storm is over. We'll not be swamped in this sea," replied our hero; and, indeed, now that they were away from the reef, the waves were not at all dangerous.

As there was no immediate danger, the spirits of the party arose accordingly, and Captain Harwood took advantage of the

fact to insist that they should make the pretense of eating some breakfast.

"We may not have so good a chance to eat in peace again," said he, as he opened the barrel of stores, taking what food came handiest and passing it to the others.

It did not take long to dispose of their frugal meal, since none had any appetite.

The fog had grown to a golden haze about them, and the waves had sunk to a gentle swell. Soon they saw a misty ball of fire, the sun, through the curtain, and the hearts of the refugees were so cheered that they gave a faint cry of delight.

Suddenly the veil of mist was torn apart, and Dick, who was standing up in the boat, facing the rising sun, uttered a yell.

"I see something black ahead!" he cried. "What if it is land?"

They all turned in the direction pointed out.

"Perhaps another wreck—this ocean is full of them," said the captain.

"Or a rock," replied Dick; "and even that would be better than to be drifting about."

"Well, we can't find out too soon what it is. To the oars!"

Soon each of the party, including Mary Welford, who insisted on sharing in the work, were rowing in the direction of the dark object that loomed up from the now sunlit waters.

"I see trees, or what looks like 'em," piped Gid, unable to restrain his curiosity, looking around, after they had been some twenty minutes at work.

"Hurrah!" cried Dick, bending to his oar. "Won't it be prime to feel real ground under foot, even if it is a place only as big as a blanket!"

The raft now fairly danced over the waters, for the prospect of once more setting foot ashore gave them all strength.

The outlines of the island could now be distinctly made out. On one side a frowning cliff arose a hundred or more feet above the sea; but at the farther end was a sloping beach, and a fringe of white breakers. It was toward this point that Captain Harwood directed the way.

"Now, then, wait for a wave," as they paused on the outer edge of the foam. "Dick, look out for your crony, and I will care for Miss Welford. Mind your eye, for here comes our wave," as a green hill of water arose behind them.

"Give way!" and on the crest of the wave the boat shot forward toward the beach.

As the wave was receding, Dick, holding his companion, jumped, followed by the captain, with Mary Welford in his arms. Together they staggered up onto the sand, out of reach of the waves.

"But the line of the raft?" inquired the captain of Dick, as he set Mary down.

"Thunder and cat's feathers!" exclaimed our hero, aghast. "It got wrenched out of my hand when I jumped."

From where they stood they could see the raft, and their barrel of provisions, dancing gayly in the outer edge of foam.

"Is there no hope of its getting swept ashore again?" asked our hero, ruefully, for he felt he was to blame for the disaster.

"It might," replied the captain, "but there is no hope for the provisions; they are irrecoverably lost."

"Well, what a blundering idiot I am, anyway!" groaned Dick. "I guess I'm not worth saving."

"Well, it can't be mended, and we are safe ashore, which is worth more than the contents of the barrel. I guess we can make out not to starve here," as Harwood cast a look up to the green trees and the lush grass of the island.

They were all so pleased to feel sound earth under foot that

even the loss could not wholly dampen their spirits, as they left the beach and mounted toward the plateau above.

"There is a chance that the island is inhabited," said the captain. "Sometimes these small islands, when they are as rich in pasture as this seems to be, are let to sheep raisers, so we needn't give up hope of getting a square meal when we need it."

They reached the plateau above in silence, too much occupied with observing in detail their new home to talk. Though the island could not have been more than half a mile in length, it was rich in vegetation, and the captain felt sure that they would find fresh water in abundance, and there must be plenty of shell-fish on which they could subsist, for want of better food.

They were working their way slowly through the underbrush in quest of a spring, for they had not had a drink since they left the wreck, when Dick suddenly laid his hand on Harwood's arm.

"I thought I heard a voice! Listen!" he said, quietly.

Then, as they all stood in an attitude of attention, a piercing cry rang out, a cry of pain and despair, that filled the silence of the woods with shuddering echoes.

CHAPTER XI.

THE FLYING SHIP AGAIN.

"It seems to me that I have heard that voice before," said Dick, in the silence that followed the cry.

"Nonsense! How could any one you know be on this lonely island?" was Harwood's retort. "Well, anyway, it's a comfort to know that the place is inhabited. We shall not be so lonely, and we can be sure of having something to eat."

"Well, whoever it is, he is in trouble. Had we not best go and see what's up? We may only find a dead man, after all, for that yell showed he was badly hurt."

"Come on; you're right! We had better go on ahead. You"—turning to Mary Welford and Gid—"may as well remain behind. We don't know but we may have a gang of ruffians to deal with."

"I'd rather go with you," said the girl, firmly.

"And me, too!" chirped Gid. "I don't want to be left alone."

"Very well," assented the captain. "But at the first sign of trouble you must make a run for the thickets."

So saying, he led the way, with Dick at his heels, and the others lined up behind, for the passage through the woods did not permit their walking abreast.

A melancholy silence had followed the cry that had startled them, and they only heard the tiny insect voices and the occasional sound of a bird roused by their progress.

In this way they made their way cautiously along until they came to an open glade. The captain, still leading, crossed this, and was about to enter the bushes on the other side, when he jumped back, with an exclamation.

"I don't know whether I'm dreaming or mad!" murmured the other.

"But what frightened you?"

"I'll show you," and he led our hero forward to a place where the bushes were few, and pointed ahead. "What do you see?"

What did Dick see? He felt that, like the captain, he must be dreaming, or going insane.

In the center of an open space, a natural amphitheatre, securely anchored to adjacent trees, was the lost flying ship!

"Silence!" exclaimed the captain, as Gid and Mary, who had followed close behind them, uttered exclamations of astonishment, as he pushed them back into the thicket.

He drew them back to one side of the glade, where the bushes were thick, to consider the situation. It was small wonder that he should feel overcome at the sight of the ship on which he had

spent so much brains and money, and believed lost beyond control, anchored in the heart of the lonely isle!

Suddenly Dick pressed his arm.

"I hear a sound like some one running, out of breath," said our hero.

As they peered out through the bushes, they presently saw a man stagger out of the bushes at the farther end of the glade, then, with a hoarse cry, fall to the ground in a huddled heap.

"They are after him!" whispered Dick. "I hear them crashing through the bushes!"

"We must save the poor devil, whoever he is," answered the captain, and, with Dick at his heels, they ran out into the open space, and, picking up the wounded man, carried him back into the shelter of the bushes, where Gid and Mary were awaiting.

"None too soon!" was the captain's remark, as a couple of men on the run entered the glade, passed the party in refuge, and disappeared, with hoarse cries, into the depth of the forest.

"You saw their faces?" the captain asked Dick.

"Sure! It was Bill Siggins and Bolger."

"Then the man we rescued—"

"Must be the engineer."

And the man they had saved was none other. He looked as if he had been in some fracas, and there was a nasty wound on his head. This the captain bound up, and, giving Hendricks some spirits from his flask, the engineer sat up and looked around.

The moment he set his eyes on Dick and the captain he would have uttered a yell if Harwood had not clapped a hand on his mouth.

"Silence, you fool! Do you want to bring those ruffians back on us? Don't take us for ghosts, though you and your pals tried hard to make us such. Those rascals would have killed you if we had not just dragged you into hiding in time."

Hendricks stared at them, aghast, and then muttered:

"Well, if this ain't a rum go, blow me!"

"Now, give an account of yourself," said the captain, harshly.

"Well, it wa'n't my fault. Them fellers would run off and leave you, and, as they was two to one, and had guns, there was nuthin' fur me to do but give in. Our water give out, and when we sighted this island they brought the machine down to get the tanks filled. I made up my mind that I'd give 'em the shake at the first chance, and told 'em so. Well, a spell ago we got into a row about it, and they both set on me, and I got this blow on the head. That's all there is to it."

He told his story so simply that the captain, who was eying him keenly all the while, could not help but believe it.

"And what was their object in running off with the ship?"

Hendricks scratched his nose, thoughtfully, for a moment.

"I couldn't just make out, and they wouldn't tell me. It seems that there was some party paid 'em to do it; why, I don't know."

"But I know!" exclaimed the captain. "That rascal who manned the other expedition. I know he had agents trying to corrupt my men, at Lake Constance, and he knew that the flying ship would beat him reaching the Sargasso Sea unless something was done to prevent it. Why didn't I suspect the dogs from the first?" and he relapsed into deep thought.

"Well, you are not downed yet, captain," said Dick. "Fortune has thrown us again in the way of the flying ship. What we must do is to take possession of her."

"If we only could!"

"Why not? There are only two of them. Come, cheer up. It will be a neat trick to play on the rascals."

He would have said more if just then voices in the distance had not warned him.

Siggins and the other sailor entered the glade again on the run.

"No need of lookin' fur him," the former was saying. "That knock I give him must have done fur him. He's lyin' dead somewheres in the bushes."

Hendricks started up, as if he would have made for them, if the captain had not held him back.

"Do you want to spoil everything, you fool?" growled Harwood.

The two sailors had by this time disappeared from view.

"They'll find I'm with a dozen dead men yet!" growled the engineer.

"Well, come, get on your feet," said the captain, helping him up. "We can't act too soon. They might get away before we could help ourselves. Wait until I see if they have returned to the ship," and he slipped quietly away, to be gone but a few minutes.

"Not a sign of them about. Now's the time!" and, giving his arm to Mary, and Dick helping the sailor, they passed out of their hiding-place and so into the amphitheatre, where the great ship was at anchor.

No sooner were Gid, the girl, and the wounded man safely aboard than they heard loud cries, and saw the two sailors running toward them.

The benzine engines were ready, and Hendricks was already at work. There was an automatic release to the cables, in case of an emergency, and just as the sailors arrived within a dozen yards of the ship, Dick called out to the captain, who was looking after the cables:

"Let her go!" and the great ropes fell off, and the ship arose slowly—very slowly.

Siggins and his companion made a running leap for the car, and, with knives between their teeth, by desperate effort, they clambered to the edge. They would have clambered aboard if they had not found themselves facing the barrels of two revolvers in Dick and Captain Harwood's hands!

CHAPTER XII.

THE CAVERN IN THE CLIFFS.

We left Captain Harwood and Dick confronting the two sailors, who were trying to climb into the car of the flying ship. The latter were in an uncomfortable position, with shining pistol barrels flashing before their eyes. They were afraid to drop off, not knowing that the flying ship was only a few yards from the grounds, and that it might have been managed safely.

"Surrender, you rogue!" cried Dick, who was in hopes that the men would jump. What on earth they should do with two such burly prisoners he had no idea. Both he and Captain Harwood hoped they would escape, for their room was preferable to their company.

"I guess you got the drop on us," gasped Bill Siggins, disgustedly. He had hardly said this when the car gave a strange lurch. Captain Harwood was thrown down, and Dick pitched forward almost into Siggins' arm. As the latter's hold was broken, he grabbed our hero, and Dick was pulled headlong over the car! They fell to the ground together, while the ship, released of weight, mounted slowly upward. The other sailor had lost his grip, too, when the lurch came, and now looked about him stupidly, as he sat on the ground.

"Here, don't let him get away, Pete!" exclaimed Siggins, as he seized Dick. "We'll keep this young bantam for a hostage," and, before our hero could stumble to his feet, the two men were upon him.

He had bruised himself in his fall, and lost his pistol, so he was not in a position to put up much of a fight against two strong men. It had all happened so suddenly that it left him dazed and confused.

"Break away there, you rascals!" called a voice, as it seemed, from the clouds. "Begone, or I'll fire!"

It was Captain Harwood, leaning over the edge of the car, revolver in hand.

"Shoot away, mister!" cried out Siggins, with a hoarse laugh. "Shoot, and you'll pink yer young man!" and he proceeded to use Dick as a shield, knowing that they had nothing to fear from the captain under the circumstances.

So it was that Harwood, from his lofty perch, was compelled to look idly on, while the pair of rogues, keeping the lad between them and danger, slowly backed away from the scene, and, once on the edge of the open space, waved a farewell to the aeronaut, and, pushing Dick ahead of them, they entered the thick of the forest.

They bound his hands behind him, in skillful sailor fashion, and, though his feet were free, he was too much bruised by that unexpected fall to think of running away. Moreover, where would he run to, and bound in such a cunning way?

"Why don't ye yell for help?" laughed Siggins, prodding him forward in a manner that made our hero's blood boil.

"Loosen my hands, and I'll take my chances with the pair of you!" he cried, hotly.

"Yer werry kind," said Bolger. "But this ain't no sportin' club show we're holdin'."

"When ye had that pistol p'inted at me," returned Siggins, "I didn't ask no favors, so yer mighty lucky if we lets ye live."

"Captain Harwood will make you smart for this!"

"I dessay he would like to, but he won't get a chance," laughing in a peculiarly aggravating way. "We shall take mighty good care of you for the next few days."

Dick wondered what they intended to do with him, for he could not see what particular reason they could have for kidnapping him.

It would be easy enough for them to keep him away from the captain in a wild island that must be full of hiding-places.

Then, Harwood could not afford to linger much longer on the island, if he ever intended to beat his enemy in reaching the treasure of the Spanish galleon.

"A miserable outlook!" was the thought that went through his mind. "I seem to be always getting into trouble." At the same time he recalled that he also had a tremendous faculty of getting out of trouble, and perhaps a chance might come for him to escape. His captors were not a very bright pair, as rogues went, and he should be able to outwit them in cunning.

What must be done, however, should be done quickly, for it was not likely the captain would linger about the place forever. He would give Dick up, believing that the sailors had done away with him.

"Hello! Somethin's the matter with that bloomin' machine!" exclaimed Siggins, as he pointed off to where the airship was moving about in a zigzag course.

Dick looked, too, and it was evident to him that there was something wrong with one of the propellers and the steering gear.

"I wouldn't mind seein' her come down kerflop to the ground," remarked Pete Bolger, savagely, seeming to find keen enjoyment in the staggering course of the ship.

"Wouldn't that jar 'em?" grinned Siggins.

"Wouldn't I like to knock your ugly heads together!" exclaimed Dick, half to himself, but loud enough for the others to hear him.

"You keep a civil tongue in your head, my young fightin' cock!" and he became aware of a very dirty fist being shaken in close proximity to his nose.

He thought it best after that to maintain silence, though raging secretly at the cold-blooded way they were expressing their hopes that the flying ship would suffer an accident.

"I dunno what we'll do for grub," grumbled Siggins, as they entered the depths of the forest and the air ship was lost sight of. "I'm gettin' all-fired hungry this minute, after that rastle in air."

"Well, there's some food left in the basket when we breakfasted by the spring, and must be a-plenty of oysters, crabs, and sich to fall back on," said his companion.

"Oh! but just think of that case of rum!" smacking his lips, "up there in the air," casting a regretful look in the direction where the ship had last been seen, and he swore a round of oaths before he could ease his feelings.

"And you and the cap put us in the hole," with a furious look at Dick, who was plodding on in silence.

"I must keep my temper, for they are just in a mood to knock me in the head for a trifle," was the thought that passed through the youth's mind at this juncture. It was well for him, perhaps, that the rum supply was gone, for it would not improve the men's tempers any to have it.

"What do you expect to do with me?" he ventured, after a time.

"Keep ye to help out the grub supply when it runs short," replied Bill Siggins, who evidently thought he was something of a humorist. "You'll know soon enough what we mean to do with ye. You won't see Captain Harwood again in a month of Sundays; jest chaw on that," with savage delight at the thought that he was worrying the lad. "Here's the hotel where we puts up," and at the same time he pointed to a cavernous hole in the side of the cliff, near which a cascade was tumbling over the rocks.

He found himself pushed into the entrance, and then found it was not as dismal inside as he had imagined, for a faint light penetrated from above, and the air was sweet, and not so damp as caves usually are.

"We are goin' to eat, and you can watch us," said Siggins, with a grin, and then they went out through the entrance, while Dick sat down on a shelf of rock, to meditate over the situation.

He could see the sailors seated in front of the opening, discussing the contents of a basket, and now and then leaning over the stream to dip up water in a meat tin for drinking.

"I wonder if they mean to starve me?" was what our hero thought, for he was conscious of a certain gnawing feeling in his stomach, which the sight of the others eating had made more keen.

As he looked around his prison, wondering how long he should be there, he had little hope that he should be able to escape. The only openings were at a great height in the roof, probably communicating with the top of the cliff.

The cave looked as if it had been lived in before, for along the walls were rocky shelves, that could never have been the work of nature alone. Perhaps pirates or castaways had lived there.

Certainly, the island offered a delightful retreat for the sea rovers, for it was well watered, and the neighborhood must abound in birds and fish.

As he was examining the cavern, he came upon a rusty staple set in the wall, with a chain attached. The sight of this relic of

other days sent a shiver over him, for no doubt many prisoners, the victims of sea raids, had been chained up there.

What made this staple of special interest was the thought that he might use it to gain his freedom. He found that, by bringing the cords that bound him across it, he could, with a little labor and dexterity, sawing back and forth, in time cut through them. But the time was not ripe for that. He would wait until he had the cover of darkness to shelter him. He felt greatly cheered, though, by the discovery.

He had just completed his examination of the cave when the men entered, and had just time to drop down on one of the rocky shelves along the wall, and assume a careless attitude.

"Glad to see you takin' things so ca'm," said Siggins, "which shows ye have sense. Here! We hain't goin' to starve ye, by a long shot," and he brought forward the basket. "Hungry, are ye?"

"I could manage to eat something."

"And so you shall!" So saying, he took a huge slab of corned beef out of the basket, slapped it between two equally thick pieces of bread, and held it out. "There's yer dinner."

"How do you expect me to eat with my hands tied?" asked Dick.

"Thunder! I never thought of that!" with a hoarse laugh. "Guess I'll have to feed ye, though it's a long day since I was feedin' kids," and he proceeded to fill Dick's mouth, greatly amused when the latter choked over the way the food was dealt out to him.

Our hero was not sorry when the meal was finished, but he kept his temper, cheered by the hope of escape. There was nothing to be gained by getting angry.

"I guess I'll go down to the sea and have a look if there's any signs of her," said Siggins, after the strange meal was finished, and he went out of the cave.

He came back, after a time, shaking his head.

"Not a spar in sight. Wonder if those pelicans would leave us in the lurch?" he said. "This island is good enough for a time, but the loneliness would wear on a chap if he had to put in a year here."

The two men drew off into a further corner of the cave, and began a muttered conversation that Dick did not hear. He wondered what they were expecting. It could not be the flying ship that was the subject of conversation. They expected something that was to take them away from the island. It was evident that they had come here for a purpose, and that it was not a chance matter.

Certainly, a life on the island would pall on the taste after a while, and he had no desire himself to be left there.

At intervals during the afternoon one of his captors would go down to the sea, only to return with the news that what was expected had not been sighted. As evening came on, they partook of the remainder of the food in the basket, sharing it with Dick, and then curled up on the stone shelves, and in a few minutes were snoring loudly.

Dick waited until quite sure that the sleep was not feigned, and then, rising cautiously, felt his way along the wall until he came upon the rusty staple left there by the old-time pirates.

Backing up to the wall, he brought the cords that bound him over the rough edge of the iron, and then by a sawing motion back and forth, just as he had hoped for, cut through the cords and found himself free!

He slipped out of the cave without waking the sleepers, and, once in the open, paused to consider. If the flying ship was gone, he had not gained much, for the sailors would be sure to hunt

for him, and, while the island seemed honeycombed with hiding-places, he was pretty sure to be starved out in time. But he was too glad to be free of the bonds, that had cut into his flesh, to take a gloomy view of the situation.

As he stood there trying to make up his mind which way to go to conceal himself for a while, so that he could rest safely until daylight, a hissing sound startled him. He saw in the direction of the sea a stream of light on the sky.

"The flying ship! Crockett!" he exclaimed, and turned to run in the direction of the light, when he felt a hand reached out to clutch him, and a voice he knew to be that of Siggins growling out:

"Not so fast, me boy!"

Dick turned, and with a dexterous sweep of his foot brought the sailor to the ground, and then was bounding down the rocks to the sea, unmindful of the danger, with the sound of hoarse voices ringing in his ears.

CHAPTER XIII.

INTO THE LION'S MOUTH!

Dick had seen by daylight, when they first brought him to the cave, how dangerous the surroundings of the place were—rocks lying about, as if tossed there by the hand of a Titan, and fissures and gullies a mountain goat would have had trouble in threading.

"This is a time to make haste slowly."

Looking back, he saw that the sailors had, somehow, managed to procure a torch, which threw a bright light over the scene.

"They're better fixed than I am," muttered our hero. "I'll let them light me down to the sea. I don't want to get there in pieces."

So he slipped behind a rock, and lay there, very still, as the sailors came up. They paused not far off from where he was hidden. They were in anything but a good humor, each blaming the other as being the cause of his escape.

"He never could get down them rocks alive," Siggins was saying. "If he dared to try, and I ain't saying but the young devil would dare to do anything, I guess he is settled and done for by this time."

"I think he must have went off that 'ere way," said Bolger. "He's got too much sense to risk breakin' his precious neck trying to reach the sea in the dark."

So saying, they moved off, and presently the sound of their wrangling voices died away in the distance.

"Well, I'm no better off than I was before," muttered Dick, but in the light of the torch falling over the rocks he had seen the dry bed of a stream, and thought that by following this he could manage to reach the beach, and he could take his time in going.

He found the bed of the stream, after some scrambling about. The bottom of it was full of loose stones and pebbles, and the walls of rock through which it had worn its way arose high enough to protect him from view, in case the sailors should get on his trail again. The hope of outwitting the two rogues made him feel in such a happy mood that he paid little heed to the bruises he was receiving as he made his way along.

Very welcome was the sight, of the sea when he came to the beach. He made his way along in the direction whence he had seen the light like a rocket shooting up the sky.

A faint new moon was shining in the heavens, but he looked in vain for the shadow of the flying ship, which he had hoped to see hovering overhead like a giant bird.

As he made his way along, keeping a sharp lookout, he saw a dark object some hundred yards from the shore, rising and falling

with the waters, that puzzled him, for the light was still not bright enough for him to make out what it was.

It did not seem large enough for the flying ship. Could it be the wreck of the *Morning Star*? he wondered. It certainly was a vessel of some kind, for he saw a green and red lantern, as he came nearer, swinging from the mast.

"Well, I've got no business with her, I guess," muttered Dick. "This must be what Siggins and his mate have been watching for all day, and, that being the case, I may as well give her a wide berth," and he turned to retrace his steps, when who should he see coming along the beach but the two sailors he had just escaped from with such trouble!

He could make out Siggins' face distinctly, since he held the torch. But they evidently had not seen him as yet, and he hoped they would not. It was not likely, if he fell into their hands again, that he would be treated as well as before, though their hospitality was not very desirable, anyway.

He made for the shadowy shrubbery that edged the sands, hoping to escape observation, when a rough voice called out so close to him as to make him jump:

"Who are you, and where are you going?"

He found himself facing a big, bearded man, in a sort of uniform, who was holding up a lantern and examining him keenly. Two other men now stepped out of the shadow silently, and ranged themselves beside our hero, as if to cut off his escape. As he could not return or go on, he was not thinking of such a thing just then.

"What's the matter? Deaf and dumb? Why don't you speak, you young fool?" growled the man in the uniform, in a threatening voice.

"Well, you took me by surprise. Give me time to get over it," said Dick, wondering with what sort of people he had to deal.

"Well, answer, and be quick about it, if you know what's good for you!"

"My name's Henslow."

"And what are you doing on this island?"

"I'm here for my health. See here, I don't see what you ask me all these questions for! Just let me go about my business," and he was turning away, when the man with the lantern seized him by the arm.

"No, you don't! I'll first see what the chief thinks of you."

"That's right; hold him!" cried a voice, and Siggins, with his torch, appeared on the scene, and eyed our hero with a look of malicious delight that was far from pleasant in expression.

"From the *Water Sprite*, I suppose?" said Siggins, addressing the man in the uniform. "We—that is, me and my partner—are the men you were expectin'," making a scraping bow.

"Oh, indeed!" eying him keenly. "Well, you must be all right, or you would not know the name of the ship. Here, look after this young cub; I have something to say to this man," and, giving Dick in charge of one of the sailors, he led Bill Siggins and Bolger, who had come up, aside, and they talked together for some time, in low voices.

"I don't know what the captain will say about this," said the head of the party, as he returned. "But I suppose we must make the most of it. The ship has made off, eh?"

"Sorry, sir, but so she has," replied Siggins. "We did the best we could, but who'd have expected a throwdown like that? She was about the neighborhood afterward, actin' as if somethin' was wrong with the machinery. This young cub, as I told you, was one of the party, and, I guess, can tell you more about the matter than I can, for he was a great crony of Captain Harwood."

"I know he can give us lots of information," said the officer,

with a grin. "We can find means to loosen his tongue, no doubt. If you had only fired the ship when you had it, we should have stopped Harwood from going any farther."

"Well, we wasn't goin' to lose the means of leavin' the island, in case you got wrecked," replied Siggins, sullenly. "We wa'n't prepared for no sich surprise as that, Mr. Sawyer."

"Well, it's too late to kick now," grumbled the officer. "I hope the chief won't take all our heads off because of it, that's all."

Dick understood now plainly that he had to deal with members of the rival expedition, and wondered what possible advantage they could gain from his capture. It might be that they hoped he would give particulars regarding the treasure learned from Captain Harwood.

"Well, we have wasted enough time here already," said Sawyer. "We may as well go aboard, and let the chief see what he can get out of this young man in the way of information," and he led the way to the edge of the sands, where a jolly boat had been hauled up.

Bidding Dick take a seat in the stern, the others waited their turn, and then pushed the boat off. There was little surf running, and they floated free without taking in much water.

Dick scanned the sky anxiously, in the hopes of seeing the flying ship and her lights, but, though it was bright and clear, not even a cloud was visible. There was no doubt that Captain Harwood had given him up, and the thought of spending weeks, perhaps months, on board the enemy's craft, with a company of rascals, was not pleasant to contemplate. He would even have preferred to remain alone on the lonely island rather than bide with such rogues and Siggins and his like.

It made him sad to think that perhaps the good Captain Harwood had suffered an accident, and that the flying ship would never reach the haven of wrecks and the Spaniards' treasure!

CHAPTER XIV.

THE MYSTERIOUS LIGHT.

"Ship ahoy!" roared the officer. Sawyer, as they approached the dark hull of the ship. As if by magic, half a dozen lights flashed up along the bulwarks.

"Aye, aye, sir!" responded several hoarse voices.

It was a steam yacht, of trim build and of some size. She had been built to meet rough weather, though her lines were far from being ungraceful.

This is what Dick noted by the light of the lanterns swinging from the ship's side, for he felt a natural curiosity as to the vessel that was to be for he knew not how long his home or prison! His thoughts were here interrupted by the voice of Sawyer, saying:

"Wake up there, young man, and shin up that ladder," pointing at the same time to the rope ladder that depended from the ship's side. Dick sighed, but, as there was no way out of it, he had to obey, and the next moment found himself on the yacht's deck, surrounded by a curious and ill-favored-looking lot of men. It seemed to him that they regarded him much as they would some curious freak at a circus.

They were black and white, dressed in odds and ends that must have been picked up at a second-hand clothier's of the poorest description.

"And this is the sort of gang I must associate with for weeks, perhaps months!" groaned Dick.

As the officer, Sawyer, came up the side, a slender man, in a blue uniform much over-trimmed with gold lace, advanced to meet him. He had a keen face, dark and not unhandsome but for the shifty expression in his beady black eyes.

"Well, Sawyer," said he, "I see you found Siggins and Bolger, all right, but I was not looking for or wanting another passenger," and he turned and waved his hand in the direction of Dick. "Who is this young man you have brought with you?"

"I can tell you that better alone, captain," nodding to the men who were looking on curiously.

"Right you are! Come with me down to the cabin. As for you," turning to the crew, "scatter about your business," and he went forward to the companionway.

"Come!" said Sawyer, advancing and slipping his arm through Dick's. "No one is going to eat you if you behave yourself."

Our hero cast a look around him, and, seeing no chance to help himself, followed Sawyer and the man they had called captain down below, where he was ushered into a small but handsomely furnished cabin.

In the center was a table, on which were a cut-glass decanter containing spirits, and two glasses.

"Take a drink first, Sawyer," said the captain, genially, and proceeded to pour out the officer a generous glass, which the latter drained at a gulp.

Dick thought he had never seen such a crafty face as the captain's, or an expression of such smiling deviltry.

"I should hate to earn that man's ill will," was the thought that went through our hero's mind. "He looks as if murder would be a pastime he would enjoy."

"Now, then, Sawyer, I will hear about how you came to load another passenger onto us," said the captain, sitting back in his chair and crossing his legs.

"Well, there isn't much to tell," replied the other, who had seated himself near Dick, "but I thought it best not to let the crew know too much of our affairs. It is quite as easy to get rid of him whenever you want to."

"I wish you would now! It can't be too soon to suit me," muttered Dick, expressing a thought aloud which the others could not help hearing.

The captain showed his white teeth in a smile that was worse than his frown, as he said, in a soft voice:

"You may be gotten rid of in a way that will not be pleasant! So don't be too presuming, young man!"

"There, I blundered again thinking aloud," said Dick to himself. "Here is a man I had better not anger," and he turned and looked through the porthole on the distant island, wishing that he were there.

"I thought this young man might have some information that would be of service to you," said Sawyer. "He was, I find, one of the company of the flying ship—a protégé of Captain Harwood's, and, therefore, able to tell us something."

"Which he will find pleasure, no doubt, in doing," smiled the captain. "You did perfectly right, Sawyer, and I thank you. And how is it he happened to be alone on the island?"

The officer told him briefly how he had been taken by the two sailors, and, while escaping, had fallen into his (Sawyer's) hands.

The captain rubbed his hands together gleefully.

"I see; a keen lad, a youth of resources. While with Harwood he must have kept his eyes and ears open. He will take pleasure in telling us all he knows, I feel sure."

But Dick was not listening; he had not heard what the captain had been saying. He had been staring through the porthole by which he was seated, on the island that lay so near and yet so far, bathed in the bright moonlight.

Was it his imagination, or did he fancy that he saw a light flash above the center of the island? No; there it was again! From where could that light have proceeded but the flying ship?

He turned abruptly around, lest they should notice his emotion. What! the flying ship so near, and he about to be carried away from it and Captain Harwood? He trembled so that he thought the others must have perceived it.

"You need not be afraid of us, my young friend," began the captain, smoothly. "We treat people well who treat us well on board the *Water Sprite*, but," and he showed his teeth, "we get our backs up when we are stroked the wrong way."

Dick said nothing to this, because he was thinking very hard. He was thinking how it was possible for him to reach that beacon light beyond on the island.

"I'm sure I don't know anything about Captain Harwood's affairs," he said, knowing that some answer was expected of him. "Do you suppose he would confide in a boy like me?"

"He surely would, since the others were only ignorant men. Now, we should greatly dislike to have to use any methods of an unpleasant nature to get you to talk."

"I know absolutely nothing," replied Dick, sullenly.

"What, you refuse to answer?" and the captain's voice rose almost to a scream.

"I might make up a story, but that would not satisfy you."

"No; we will have the truth. Listen," and the captain arose, threateningly, and shook a warning finger at Dick. "We have a very nice little cabin in the hold of the ship. It is dark, and not very well ventilated, and it is occupied by animals that go about on four legs, and are not esteemed as pets." Here he smiled. "We will resign that elegant stateroom to you, and when you are ready to talk you can come up. You will find that you can't come up before."

"And what if I told you a lie after all that?" asked Dick, undaunted.

The captain laughed loudly.

"A very shrewd lad—very shrewd! Why, we should keep you with us, and then if your story were false—well, you would never say a word, false or true, again! See the point?" with a look that made our hero shiver all over.

"You see, I tell you this all beforehand, in case you think you can deceive us."

Dick was silent for a moment, wondering how he was to get out of the clutches of this smiling wretch.

"Now, then, it is getting bedtime," and the captain glanced at his watch. "What is your answer?"

"This!" and with a quick movement Dick snatched up the heavy decanter from the table and hurled it at the lamp swinging above their heads!

A sound of shattered glass followed, and before the two men could recover from the surprise he had dashed for the door, smashed it open with a vigorous kick, and was running up the companionway to reach the deck.

He heard the captain and his companion floundering around in the dark; then his foot slipped and he went down! He was up in a second, but he heard them now close behind him.

He reached the deck with the cries from below ringing in his ears. The crew came hurrying forward to stop him, but before they could reach him he leaped to the rail and plunged head first into the sea!

CHAPTER XV.

A NEW START.

When Dick Henslow made his leap into the sea while escaping from the *Water Sprite*, he did not take care how he struck the water. His only object and endeavor was to get away from the ship and a captain he detested. Then there was that alluring

light that he had seen through the porthole as coming from the island.

When he arose to the surface he found himself within the glare of a dozen lanterns hung over the ship's side, and heard the captain and Sawyer yelling and swearing at the crew for letting him escape.

"There he is now!" exclaimed the captain, as Dick, after the first stunning result of his false plunge, rose to the surface. "Shoot, you beggars! What are you waiting for?"

That was enough for our hero, who when he heard that word of command and knew that it meant business, at once dove under water. It was not for nothing that he had been brought up in earlier days on Cape Cod, and knew the sea from his childhood. He was able to keep under water for a long length of time. What his object was, was to get out of the radius of light from the ship into the gloom beyond, where they must be good marksmen indeed if they were able to hit him.

He heard the patter of the bullets plashing the water—indeed, several reached him, dead and spent.

When he dared to rise to the surface again, he could still hear the captain roaring at his men for their bad aim, and cursing everything, and Dick in particular.

"There's the beggar's head now! Aim again, ye lubbers!" yelled the captain, and Dick, who thought he was out of range of observation, was too weak from his recent exertions to think of diving again, so he swam toward the shore, keeping his head as little above water as possible, while a perfect volley of bullets rained around him, none, fortunately, striking him.

Even as he swam he kept his eyes fixed on the island, and he was rejoiced to find that the light was still there. He hoped, of course, that it was from the flying ship, come in quest of him, but then might it not be the signal fire from some party of castaways? He knew that in the North Atlantic wrecks were frequent. Still he was not willing to give up the idea that beyond there were his good friend Harwood, Gid and the rest of the party.

He thought that now that he had entered a darker belt of water, and was swimming his best, he must be out of sight of those on the ship. He was doomed to be deceived, for presently he heard the captain scream out:

"Cease your firing, you fools! You are worse marksmen than Spaniards! Out with the boats, and we shall overhaul the young rascal."

"If I can only reach the shore before they reach me," muttered Dick. "Rather than fall into their hands again I would sooner drown myself."

While he was not lacking in courage, there was something about the captain of the *Water Sprite* that sent a shudder over him whenever he thought of him.

In the meantime he swam as he had never swum before, with the energy of despair, feeling that he would rather perish from the exertion than be brought back ignominiously to that odious ship. But he had been overtaxing his strength, and the exciting events of the evening had begun to tell on him, and though he put forth all his reserve force, it seemed that he would never gain the shore. He heard the sound of the sailors' voices wafted to him as they dropped into the boat, which must have been the same that had brought him to what might have been his prison.

They seemed to be delighted with the task of overhauling the prisoner who had escaped them. Probably their enforced idleness on the ship gave the incident the interest of a hunting exploit.

"Will I ever reach the shore?" groaned poor Dick, for it seemed to him that he made no headway whatever, though he was now within sound of the roaring surf.

The boatload of men must now be very near, and yet, strive as he might, he could make no progress ahead.

In his frightened condition he did not know that he was just outside the beginning of the breakers, and consequently held back by the rush and go of the waves. And now he could hear the laughing and talking of the sailors in the boat. They did not attempt to shoot now; they were too sure of their prey.

The thought of getting back into the villainous captain's hands caused Dick to plunge forward with all the strength that was in him. Then a great wave caught him up, whirled him, tumbled him about, and the next thing he knew he was staggering to his feet on the wet beach. The waves had done what he could not do for himself!

He certainly had the joke on his enemies—if, indeed, it had been a time for joking—for they were still lingering on the outer edge of the breakers waiting for a good wave that would carry them to the shore.

It was in vain that Sawyer stormed and fumed and called them various villainous names. They would not budge until they met the wave that would carry them safe ashore.

"Our lives is wuth somethin' if yourn hain't," growled out one member of the crew who objected to plunge the jolly boat among the breakers at the wrong time.

Dick, who had staggered to his feet, feeling dazed and weak, heard this, and waited to hear no more. He ran along the shore until he found a cut in the dense underbrush, and made his way through the opening, hoping to gain the centre of the island, where he had seen the mysterious light.

It was just as he entered this dark alley that he heard an exultant cry behind him, and knew that a favorable wave had finally carried the boat to the beach, and that they were now all after him. He made his way as rapidly as he could over the uneven ground, and as he proceeded further he felt that he must have taken the wrong direction, for no longer was the strange light visible. He was passing through a sort of stone passage with walls on either hand, unscalable heights, from which no escape seemed possible, and he heard the yells of the sailors, as it seemed, at his heels.

As he made his way along, wet and dripping and weary, he was beginning to despair, for this strange alley between the rocky walls seemed to have no outlet; at least, they must overhaul him before he could reach an outlet.

Looking back he saw the flash of torches, and knew that it was only a question of time before they would overtake him. If he had only known something of the topography of the island he might have stood some chance, but as it was, he had evidently walked unconsciously into a trap, where he would be caught like a rat in a snare!

Still he ran on in the hopes of finding an outlet to these imprisoning walls that hemmed him in on either side.

There was no hope of escape by climbing those rocky walls; they would have defied the agility of a chamois.

Now he could hear the shouts of triumph of his pursuers ringing in his ears. They knew, too, that they had him, and were running forward, eager to capture their victim.

"I wonder if I shall ever live to get out of this hole?" was Dick's thought, as he cast an anxious glance up at the frowning walls of stone on each side of him.

Already he felt that, no matter what the conditions were, he could not proceed much further.

Still he ran on with the hope of youth, and then suddenly he came, when he least expected it, to an open glade, and beyond saw a gleam of light that gave him courage.

He was out of that dreary tunnel of stone anyway. He had now the range of the island in which to find a hiding-place.

Was it the fire from a party of castaways? His eyes, coming out of the gloom, were blinded by this sudden and unexpected flash of light. Yet he made for it as a haven of refuge, not knowing but that it might have been kindled by the crew of the *Water Sprite*. Anything was better than the dense gloom of the place he had just left, and so he ran on.

He was brought up short by a loud cry:

"Not a step further!"

He looked up and faced Captain Harwood with a rifle in hand.

"Captain Harwood!"

"Dick, my son! Where have you been?" and he was clasped in the captain's arms as warmly as if they had been of the same flesh and blood.

"They are after me! They will be here in a minute!" gasped Dick, as he briefly explained the situation.

"Will they, indeed?" replied the captain, dryly. "If they want any trouble with us they shall have a warm reception. Come, my boy," and just as the flaming torches of the crew of the *Water Sprite* appeared in the open, Harwood took Dick by the arm and hurried him in the direction of the light.

"It's the flying ship, all right!" said the captain, "and I should like nothing better than an engagement with those devils."

By this time they had reached the ship, and the captain helping Dick on board, the latter found himself embraced by Gid Crossly and warmly shaken by the hand by Mary Welford.

"Glad to get back, but we must 'tend to business," gasped Dick, after the first exchanges of friendly feeling were over.

"Right you are, Dick! Always ready!" said the captain, as the horde burst upon the scene, some with waving torches, some with lanterns.

"Who are you?" roared Captain Harwood.

"Never mind who we are. Enemies of yours, anyway," cried the officer Dick had heard called Sawyer, and the latter waved his men on.

"Hendricks, are you ready?" asked Captain Harwood of the engineer.

"Ready when you are, yer honor."

Captain Harwood advanced to the front of the car and called out: "If you people value your lives, go back!"

"A bluff!" yelled Sawyer. "Fire!"

A rattle of musketry followed. Captain Harwood advanced to the little Gatling gun in the front of the car, and without more ado aimed it at the invading crew. A turn of the lever, and the machine began to spit bullets.

"Stand, ye lubbers! Are ye afraid of that pill box?" yelled Sawyer.

The gun continued to pour out its leaden hail, and though no one was hit, the sailors suddenly turned tail and fled through the woods, pursued by the whistling shots.

Sawyer alone remained in the center of the field, sharply outlined in the moonlight.

"I hate to strike down a single man with this machine," cried Harwood, "but follow the hounds you led, or you shall have a dose."

"We shall meet again!" roared Sawyer.

"Not in this world, and in the next I shan't be going your way," and as the officer of the *Water Sprite* disappeared in the forest Captain Harwood gave the orders to "Let loose!" and the majestic machine arose in the air, described a graceful circle, and finally soared out over the island in the direction of the *Water Sprite*.

Captain Harwood had arranged the speed of his ship so carefully that he hovered for a moment just over the vessel of his enemy.

"Just hand over those packages in the corner," he said to Dick, at the same time pointing to several bags in a corner.

Having obtained them the captain applied a light to one corner of each and dropped them.

"At once the sea was lit up on all sides with blue and red fire from the flaming bags.

"See you next year!" yelled Harwood. "I celebrate my departure!" and the flying ship mounted into higher air and sped on its way!

CHAPTER XVI.

AT THE STORM'S MERCY.

"I hope that we shall never see the *Water Sprite* again," said Dick Henslow, as leaning over the edge of the car he looked down on the fast receding shadow of the ship lying like a blot on the shining surface of the ocean, framed in by the colored fires.

"They can't say but what we give 'em a fine Fourth of July send off," piped out Gid Crossly, "though I guess they don't feel very proud over it."

No one of the party was sorry when the ship was no longer visible, and it was a good-natured lot of people that turned in to snatch a few hours' sleep before the morning dawned, for they were all tired out and slumbered in spite of the exciting events of the night.

There was the promise of a delightful day when the sun arose, which added to the high spirits of the party.

Captain Harwood, having taken his bearings, was satisfied that the island they had just left must be one of the Azores, though nothing exactly like it appeared on the chart.

It was a generous meal that they all sat down to that morning, and the captain insisted on drawing on all the good things among the stores, so that the feast might be a memorable one. As for Gid Crossly, it was a wonder where he was able to stow the food he consumed.

"Now the question is," said the captain, after they returned to the open car, "where do you want us to land you, Miss Welford?"

The girl looked at him in surprise, and there was a quiver about her lips, as if the question were a painful one.

"Where you will land me?" she asked. "Why, are you tired of me so soon?"

"Not in the least," replied Harwood, heartily. "But then, why should you go into needless danger? It is hardly the kind of an expedition for a young lady to enter on."

The two lads looked at her sympathetically, for they had both learned to like the girl, and felt that she would be a great loss, since she was always so good-natured and obliging.

"But there is nowhere I could go—you forget I have lost my father, and except for an aunt and a few cousins in England, there is no one in the world I could go to."

She turned her head away so that they would not see that her eyes were filled with tears.

Captain Harwood looked puzzled, as if he were at a loss what to do under the circumstances. He felt that it would be hardly right for him to take her into danger, and yet he would feel her loss very deeply.

"But, my dear, only think. We know not what dangers await us beyond there, in that mysterious sea. It may be that we shall meet with great suffering, if nothing more serious."

"I'm sure you and these young men are brave enough to protect me when it comes to that. I should not know where to go or what to do alone in the world."

"We should be very glad to have you with us——"

"Then it only depends on me to say whether I shall go or not?" asked the girl, eagerly.

Harwood nodded.

"Then I will go! I am not made of gingerbread, as you may have found out by this time. I am a sea captain's daughter and have met danger before this. Besides, it would delay your expedition if you had to stop and put me ashore. So, captain, I beg that you will not leave me, but take me with you."

"There, cap, you ain't goin' to refuse the polite request of a lady, are you?" asked Gid, with a twinkle in his eyes.

"If you do we'll all mutiny, and where will you be!" exclaimed Dick.

"Certainly if she wants to come along she shall," replied Harwood. "And there is no more valuable member of the expedition. I only wanted to warn you against the dangers we might incur."

"I guess I can stand them as well as the others," said the girl, stoutly.

"Bully for you!" piped Gid. "And I guess you'll find that me and Dick will break our necks to serve you."

"I hope there won't be any call for that," replied Mary, with a faint smile. "And so it is settled, captain, that I am not to be put ashore?"

"You shall have your wish, and to tell the truth, I guess we are all pleased with your decision. Eh, boys?"

"Well, rather!" cried Dick, warmly.

"Rah for the lady stewardess!" yelled Gid, with a voice like a screech owl. "We don't want to make this a flyin' stag party."

So the question was settled, and there was no one so pleased as the captain's daughter over the turn of events. If Harwood had any misgivings about her going, he said no more, since he saw her heart was set on it.

Certainly such a plucky young woman would be no detriment to the expedition, and could be useful in many ways, as she had already shown.

The affair being settled to suit every one, the gloom that threatened the party in the loss of their fair passenger was averted, and they were all in good spirits once more and able to enjoy the beautiful day.

The captain busied himself over his charts and nautical instruments, while the lads, armed with spyglasses, swept the sea on the lookout for islands and passing ships.

"I dunno whether you know it or not, cap," said Hendricks, coming forward, but there's a leak in the water tank, and I don't

believe we've got enough to last the day out if any one gets very dry."

"Gracious! Why didn't you let us know that before," said Harwood, with a frown, "when we were on the island, where there was plenty of good water to be had?"

"Well, I just noticed it. I think them pelicans we had so much trouble with must have been foolin' with the tank when they had the ship in their hands."

"Shouldn't wonder, for the machinery was a little out of order as a result of their visit."

"What we goin' to do about it? There's plenty of wine."

"We can't spare that. Must keep that for sickness or an emergency. There is nothing to be done but stop at the first island and fill up the tank," with a sigh. "This is really too bad! Everything happens to delay us."

"It is tough, but I don't see no help for it," and Hendricks went back to his work.

Captain Harwood was greatly put out, as he explained the situation to Dick.

"Don't want to work the condensers," said he, "for they take too long, and we shall need the water at once. We could never trust to luck to get water when we entered the Sargasso Sea. There's no help for it, but we must find an island and fill up the tank after we have located the leak and patched it up. So keep your eye peeled for an island and we will descend."

It was not until the afternoon that Gid Crossly, who had been busy on the lookout, uttered the delighted yell:

"Land ho!"

The others crowded to the edge of the car and peered down.

"Why, that can't be an island," remarked Dick, as he saw a brown patch on the sea beyond. "It doesn't look any bigger than this ship."

"It's an island, all right," grumbled Gid. "I didn't agree to find one as big as Manhattan."

"We won't send you looking for islands again, if that is the best you can do," laughed our hero, good-naturedly. "It is an island, sure enough," as he looked through the glass.

"Think it looks like a place to find water?" asked the captain.

"Seems little more than a strip of sand with a small mound and some trees in the center."

"Don't know of such a place on the chart, but we can't be choosers, for we never can tell when we shall strike another one. There ought to be a spring among those trees, so we may as well go down and investigate," and giving the engineer directions and taking charge of the steering arrangements, they prepared to descend.

"Dirty weather coming up," with an anxious look at the sky. "I only hope it will clear up until we have got the water and got off."

They descended to the narrow strip of sand, and while the captain and engineer busied themselves in repairing the leak in the water tank the three young people set off for the knoll in the center of the island in quest of the water.

There was a friendly race on the part of the lads to see who should get to the top of the knoll first.

Dick was too tired from his recent adventures to do much sprinting, and Gid, with a triumphant yell, was the first to reach the group of trees.

His joyous call was changed to a howl of dismay by the time Dick and the girl had come up with him.

"My, look at that!" cried the ex-newsboy, as he pointed to something at the foot of a tree.

Mary Welford jumped back in fear, uttering an exclamation, too. Dick saw that it was a skeleton which, from the tattered rags of faded blue that still clung to the whitened bones, was evidently that of a sailor.

They looked for some moments at this gruesome object, wondering how the man had met his fate. Had he been left there by his companions or had he swum there from a wreck?

"Starved to death, poor fellow, I dare say," muttered Dick, as they turned away. "I suppose there is nothing on the island to support life. I pity any one cast away on this sad-looking place."

"Well, we ain't gettin' that water, are we?" said Gid. "Come on, if you don't want the captain to be after us with a gun," and they entered the grove of little trees, the one green spot in that dismal island.

"It won't take us long to find what this place affords," said Dick.

Gid, who had run on ahead, beckoned to them to come forward.

"Here's some water!" said he, and then pointed to a slender stream that was trickling along the roots of one of the trees. "But it looks more like pea soup."

Certainly the water was of a peculiar color, and not very inviting.

Dick got out his folding drinking cup and tasted it.

"Bah! Salt as brine—a regular pickle," as he spat it out.

"Well, it's the nearest thing to water here," said Gid, who had been running here and there, exploring.

"I guess that poor sailor died of thirst," was Mary's comment. "It seems to me that I would rather die of hunger than of thirst."

"Well, we shan't get left, after all, for here is rain, and a good one," as the drops began to patter among the trees.

He had hardly said this when they were nearly swept off their feet by a wind that bent the trees down to the ground, while everything grew black about them, as if night were coming on.

"Let us run back to the ship—this is a tornado of the worst kind!" gasped Dick, and taking Mary by the hand, and bidding Gid run on, they made their way, stumbling, from the grove, in the face of such a wind as they had never encountered in their lives.

When they came into the open, a jagged flash of lightning seemed to tear the black sky apart, and in that flash they saw the flying ship suddenly dash skyward, as if borne up by a giant's hand, and disappear in the gathering gloom of the awful storm!

CHAPTER XVII.

THE PREY OF THE SEA.

"She's lost! She'll never live through it!" exclaimed Dick, as the flying ship disappeared from view. "Come back among the trees; we shall be blown into the sea if we stay here."

In the roar of the gale it was doubtful if they heard what he said, but he had Mary Welford by the hand and Gid, who had crept up to him in fear, seized him by the other hand, and then they dragged themselves back to the little knoll they had just left.

The small trees offered scant protection, but it was better than nothing.

They crouched in a huddled group at the foot of the largest of them in silence.

Suddenly Gid Crossly cried out as if in pain, so loudly that they heard him above the noise of the rain.

"What is it, old boy?" asked Dick.

"That thing—I just put my hand on it!" cried the lad, in fright; and when a flash of lightning for a second lit up the scene they saw what he meant.

They had sought refuge under the very tree where the remains of the sailor lay.

It was useless to attempt to soothe his companions; they would no longer stay in the vicinity of those poor bones, so Dick had to move over to another refuge.

In a lull in the storm, and when it was less dark, he went out of the circle of trees to reconnoiter. Perhaps after the storm had abated the flying ship would return, and yet he could not see how she could weather such a tornado.

"It is getting lighter," he said, when he returned, not wanting the others to know how fearful he was of their position.

"I guess she'll soon be back and take us off," said Gid, with chattering teeth. "Don't you think so, Dick?"

"Oh, of course, of course! Not a doubt about it. Think the captain would leave us here to perish?"

He forced himself to speak so confidently that his companions appeared to be comforted. They were ready at that time to grasp at any straw of hope.

Dick did not tell them that he believed that long ere this the *King of the Air* had been torn to ribbons by the fury of the gale, and that the brave captain and his companion had found a watery grave in the ocean.

"Well, we wouldn't have to look far for water now," he said, with a feeble attempt to joke.

"Seems to me she's been gone a mighty long while," muttered Gid, who was beginning to have some doubts of his own.

"You can be sure that it is not the captain's fault," replied Dick. "I suppose he's waiting until the storm goes down a bit before he tries to beat back."

"I wouldn't want to spend the night with that skel'ton," shivered the former newsboy.

"Why not?"

"He might get up and go walkin' about and there wouldn't be a chance to get away from him on this little place."

"The poor fellow will never walk again, night or day; so don't worry yourself, Gid," replied Dick.

"Jest the same I don't want to make the acquaintance of no ghost."

It did seem as if the storm were going down and the sky clearing, and Dick had some hopes that perhaps the flying ship had got through without an accident.

But though he went out and looked several times, there was no sign of their hoped-for rescuer.

"I'm gettin' mighty hungry," was the remark with which Gid broke a long silence. "I wouldn't stick up my nose at a plate o' hash in a hobo restaurant on Park Row."

"We'll make up for it as soon as we are back on the ship," said Dick. "Here, tackle this cracker I slipped in my pocket before we started," and he handed over a piece of hard tack which Gid would have had the girl share with him, only she persisted that she had no appetite.

Things were getting desperate, for the night would soon be upon them, and the thought of remaining there in the drizzle with the roar of the sea in their ears, would have frightened braver hearts. There was nothing now that they could do but wait for morning, and the ship, if she was not a wreck, would certainly return to their rescue.

Gid, having consumed his cracker, fell asleep from sheer fatigue, forgetting all about the poor skeleton.

Mary Welford had soon followed his example, but Dick could not sleep, for he felt it his duty to watch over the others, though there was little that he could do to help them.

As the night wore on he sank into an uneasy doze, and was only roused by the voice of Gid yelling in his ear.

"Look, Dick! Oh, Dick, look!"

He was on his feet in a moment, staring around sleepily.

The little knoll on which they had sought refuge was entirely surrounded by water; the waves were almost washing the ground at their feet and seemed coming nearer and nearer every moment.

The island must soon be submerged by the sea!

Then for the first time Dick gave way and wrung his hands.

"God help us all!" he groaned. "Nothing can save us now. We are all doomed!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

IN DESPERATE STRAITS.

After the first exclamation of despair wrung from him by their peril, Dick did not give forth a sound. Mary Welford, too, seemed too stunned by the discovery of their danger to say anything, and for a time they eyed each other in stony silence.

The tornado had changed the color of the sea to a dirty yellow hue, and they watched the waves break on the sands within a few yards of where they were crouching, with almost listless indifference.

"What shall we do? What shall we do?" asked Mary Welford, at last appealing to Dick as if he could work a miracle.

"I only wish I knew," shaking his head, sadly.

"Do you think the whole island will be flooded?"

"It looks mighty serious. I must find out if the sea is really gaining on us."

They watched him in melancholy silence, as he reached up and, breaking off a twig from the tree nearest, planted it firmly on the sand at the water's edge.

"We shall soon know the worst now. When the waters flow past the twig there won't be any room for doubt."

They sat in silence watching the mark that was to decide their fate, much as condemned prisoners might wait the fall of the executioner's ax.

"I think that the water is gaining!" exclaimed the girl, after a time.

"No, no!" replied Dick, reassuringly. "The wind is merely blowing the water toward us."

He spoke confidently, but in his heart he had a dull feeling that perhaps she was right.

Gid Crossly did not utter a sound now, but seemed to have sunk into a state of stupor.

"It's no use for us to deceive ourselves any longer," said Mary. "The water has passed the mark, and in a few minutes we shall be in the midst of the water, with our last refuge gone."

Yes, it was only too true. The yellow waters had passed the twig and were slowly, with soft, lapping sound, sweeping toward them.

"You are right, we need hope no more. We are lost!" said Dick.

For a moment he watched the invading waters crawling nearer and nearer, like a stealthy animal approaching its prey.

To drown there without being able to make even a fight for it was to our hero the worst fate that could befall any one. But every chance was gone. In all that bleak ocean surging around them they could find no hope.

The little strip of sand on which they had found refuge must have lain out of the course of vessels, for they had not sighted a sail that day. Even if they had, they would have stood small chance of attracting attention, since they were but a speck now on the sea, and soon the yellow waves would be surging over even that.

Perhaps owing to the rising ground the water drew near them now slowly, but it was still coming in. Their fate would only be postponed a little longer.

"We can't even get up into those trees; they wouldn't support any of us," said Dick, gloomily, as he looked at the slender trunks and delicate boughs of the little grove.

"You can have water to drink if you want it," said Gid, who had found a pool of rain water on the highest point of the knoll. It seemed a mockery to think of either drinking or eating at such a time, but Dick was dry, and taking out his pocket cup insisted that Mary should drink, and then followed her example.

Gid had also unearthed a peculiar shellfish that had been washed up on the hillock by the waves, and which proved to be eatable.

They were all surprised that they found them good, and even relished them.

They were recalled to the seriousness of their position by the sight of the water washing at the foot of the outer edge of the trees.

Suddenly Gid gave a yell that made the others think he was being swept out to sea.

"What's the matter with you?" asked Dick.

"Don't ask me what's the matter. But look! Look off there!" and he pointed off toward the right of where they were standing.

"It's a whale, ain't it? And won't he come here and eat us all up?" in a panic of fright.

Gid's idea of natural history had certainly never been gained in books devoted to the subject.

What Dick saw was something black rising and falling on the waters.

"It looks like a bit of a wreck. I only wish it would drift in reach of us, for even that would be better than nothing."

"Well, I'm glad it ain't a whale," was Gid's remark. "And the wind is blowin' it this way as sure as I'm a gun!"

They watched the strange object which was approaching with eager eyes, more because it was the one object on the monotonous stretch of ocean than for any other reason.

"Looks like the broken top and cross-trees of a mast," said Dick. "I suppose it's a bit of some poor ship that went down in last night's storm."

Nearer came the bit of wreck and then suddenly stopped.

"Too bad," grumbled Gid. "We might have hung on to her until we were picked up."

"And perhaps we can yet," replied our hero, cheerily. "Just wait, and while I am gone, Gid, collect all the shellfish you can, for we may have need of them. I think she has grounded on the island, and then we can get aboard if the water is shallow."

So saying, he gave his coat to Mary, and stepped down into the yellow waters. It was a sharp descent at first, but at last his feet struck bottom, and he found that the water was only up to his shoulders.

He made his way as rapidly as he could toward the bit of wreck, expecting any moment that the waves would carry him off.

He found that it was a mast with the cross-trees and a ragged piece of sail floating out around it.

There was certainly place on the cross-trees, for the three of them to cling. A sorry refuge, but better than nothing.

When he had climbed up on the cross-trees to examine it, he heard a yell from the direction of the knoll. Gid was waving his hat wildly, and Dick, from where he stood, could guess the reason.

The sea had crept up and was now swirling around the refuge. There was no time to be lost if he would save his companions.

He dropped down into the water again, which he found higher than when he reached the spar. He found it harder, too, to make his way along, but the knoll was reached at last and he found Gid and the girl standing ankle deep in water.

"Come, Mary, you first!" cried Dick. "There is not a moment to be lost."

He took her up in his arms, and not heeding Gid's cries, set out again on his perilous journey through the flood.

What a journey it was! He had never been through such labor as was required to get the girl to the wreck, but at last the spar was reached and he had bestowed his burden up among the cross trees out of reach of the waves.

"Oh, look, Dick! Look!" she cried, pointing toward what remained of the island.

"Why, the young fool is trying to swim here!" exclaimed Dick, and such was the case. The little fellow, unable to remain there alone, had bravely set out to follow them.

"He'll never do it. He'll be swept away!"

And as she spoke, for a moment, the bobbing head disappeared.

Dick took a leap into the sea and was striking out in the direction of the drowning boy.

It was a hard pull, but the thought that his little crony was in grave danger, if not almost beyond hope, was enough to nerve his arms. He could see the water surging around the trees that seemed sinking out of sight, then a head appeared above the water and he made a reach for its owner.

It was Gid, pretty well exhausted.

Dick turned about and made for the wreck again, helping his friend along as best he could.

What were our hero's feelings when that miserable refuge was reached at last and Mary Welford helped them onto it.

If Gid was unconscious now, Dick was not far from being in the same condition from exhaustion and fatigue. He sank down near where the girl was seated and for some moments forgot everything.

He was aroused presently by feeling a touch on his sleeve, and, looking up, was glad to find that it was Gid, apparently none the worse for his experience.

"Look at the island, Dick!" cried the little fellow, pointing with a shudder toward the place where they had left but a few short minutes before.

All Dick could see was the tops of a few trees, and then there was a whirl of water and they sank from sight, and far and near there was nothing but the limitless expanse of sea.

Then the spar, which had been stationary, seemed to tremble, as if moved from below, then drifted off with the three clinging to it into the liquid desert!

CHAPTER XIX.

THE BORDERS OF THE STRANGE SEA.

They were too tired to talk, to think of anything but the fate they had so strangely escaped, lying listlessly there on the spar, which arose and fell with a rocking motion on the waves.

"It's fortunate for us that the sea is calm," said Dick, who was the first to arouse himself. "With the waves running high we wouldn't have found this much of a refuge."

"Well, we've got a good chance to get picked up by a passin' ship, I guess," said Gid. "Anything was better than that old island with the dead sailor on it."

He seemed to have recovered his spirits amazingly.

"Yes, there's a chance," replied Dick; "that is, if we can make ourselves seen. We must rig up some kind of a signal or they might pass us by."

He found a loose spar still clinging to a shred of canvas, and after a hard half hour's work, and the help of the others, succeeded in making it stand upright at the highest point of the cross-trees, using a piece of the sail they dragged from the water as a signal.

They regarded their work with great satisfaction after it was done: it seemed to bring their rescue so much nearer. So little does it need to comfort those who have been wrecked.

"But what are we going to do for water to drink?" asked Mary.

"I was thinking of that myself, for, like you, I think thirst must be worse to suffer from than hunger."

"There's some here—a little," put in Gid, who had been nosing around in his usual fashion. "It's some rain water caught in a fold of this bit of sail," pointing. "I tasted it, and it's sweet enough—just a little salt."

There was about a quart that had been caught in the sail from the rain of the night before, and Dick took what measures he could to prevent its being spilled.

"This is a lucky find, and we don't know when we shall have any more, unless another rain comes on, and it's not likely, in a hurry, after the amount that fell last night."

"Oh, Lord!" exclaimed Gid, suddenly. "I forgot all about those shellfish you asked me to collect, Dick!"

"You're a nice one——"

"Don't blame the poor fellow," put in Mary. "He was too frightened to think of anything. I took care of that," and she produced an improvised bag made from an apron that was full of the shellfish she had gathered—a sort of mussel, which they had found quite eatable, though a trifle salt.

"Good!" cried Dick. "We won't feel like kicking over the meager bill of fare. We have food and drink, and now if we only have the luck to strike a ship we'll soon forget the suffering we've been through."

Certainly what they should eat and drink was one of the most serious questions to confront them, and it was good to know that that was settled for a little while.

But were they on the track of the ships? Dick was afraid not; but he did not tell the others of his fears.

They made a meal off the shellfish, and drank sparingly of their store of water, and hope began to revive in their youthful hearts.

To make matters more comfortable they dragged what remained of the sail on board, and arranged it over the spars so that if they must pass the night there they could get some rest.

It was more than likely that they might spend many nights there, Dick thought, unless a storm came up, and then—but he did not want to think of such gloomy chances.

The sun burned brightly in the heavens, and it was a great comfort to them, since it dried their wet clothes. On the other hand, it made them very thirsty and helped to decrease their small supply of water by evaporation.

Not a speck dotted the sea, or a sign of a ship.

The evening of a long day came on and they slept at last from sheer weariness, though Dick had tried to keep his eyes open and watch over the others.

While his companions slept he had taken care to lash them fast to the spar, lest they should roll overboard. Nor did they wake up even while he was doing it.

He fell asleep thinking of Captain Harwood, and wondering what had become of the brave man.

He did not know what time of the night it was that he was awakened by a strange, churning noise in his ears.

It startled him at once with a cry. For beyond loomed up a dark shadow that seemed moving toward them rapidly.

"A steamer!" he screamed. "A steamer!"

The others had awakened, too.

"We're in her track. She'll run us down!" from Gid, and the great object was certainly sweeping down on them.

"Yell for all you're worth!" screamed Dick. And they did.

They heard the churning of the screw, and the rush of waters about her bow. The big spar to which they were clinging whirled about as if it would be engulfed in the swell.

"Hold fast!" called Dick, warningly.

It was all over in a moment, the great, black thing rushed on with colored lanterns on her spars, and they caught the twinkle of the cabin lights, and then they were in a whirl of foam from the screw, alone on the trackless ocean once more!

"If it had only been in the daytime, they would not have failed to notice us, as we were right in their course," said Dick, gloomily, as the last gleam from the lights of the ship faded away in the distance.

"Better luck next time," replied Mary Welford. "Now we know that we are not out of the ships' course; we stand a good chance to fall in with another any time."

"I hope so, but it was so mighty provoking to be within reach of rescue and then slip up."

"Guess we'd have slipped down if she had ever hit us a good lick," was Gid's comment.

There was no thought of sleep after that. They were all too much excited, and yet cheered, for it looked to them now as if they must soon be rescued.

So they drifted about through the weary night until the morning broke, glad enough to see the sun again.

The sea was calm, and floating about were masses of weed of a yellow and brown tinge.

"Know what that means, Dick?" asked Gid, pointing to the curious vegetation that became thicker as they drifted on.

"Yes, and it makes me think of poor Captain Harwood, who told me all about it. It's the Sargasso weed thrown up by the Gulf Stream. It's that which fills the mysterious sea and holds the lost ships. There it is massed and matted together so that once they enter the sea they can never get out again."

They regarded the strange vegetation in silent wonder.

"I only hope that if we are to be rescued that it will come soon," and he cast an anxious look over the ocean.

"Can't be too soon to suit me," said Gid. "I'm gettin' mighty tired of eatin' nothin' but those beastly shellfish."

"You're lucky to have anything as good as that, old man; it may be a long time before we get anything better."

He thought it best not to frighten them by telling them that he believed they were slowly, but surely, drifting into the Sargasso Sea, and that once in they might never get out again.

They did not sight a ship all day, and every hour the weeds on the surface of the waters grew more dense.

A current was bearing them swiftly on, and Dick knew it was that which carried the wrecks and spars into the Haven of Lost Ships. They were in a desperate condition when night set in, for the food would not last another day, and the sun had evaporated the last drop of water.

"We had better try and sleep and forget our troubles," said Dick, when the moon rose. "To-morrow we may have better luck in sighting a ship."

"Why, it looks as if we was crossin' a medder!" exclaimed Gid, for the surface of the water was now so covered with weeds that it did resemble a field. It was so calm and still that it was hard to believe they were really on the ocean.

"There's no doubt where we are now," said Dick. "I know from what the captain told me that we must be on the edge of the Sargasso Sea. There's no chance of our meeting a ship now, for they keep away from the neighborhood."

"Then, what's that on ahead there!" cried Gid, and turning in the direction pointed out, the others saw a great, black shadow immovable in the distance.

"And we are headin' right for it, too!" continued Gid, enthusiastically. "No ships come here, eh? Well, you just wait and see, that's all!"

Dick could not make out clearly what it was, for there were no lanterns displayed, and the moon just then had swept behind a cloud.

The spar on which they were clinging now seemed to move forward more rapidly, with a swishing noise, and it had grown very dark. So for half an hour or more they drifted on, oppressed by the silence and the gloom around them.

Suddenly a crash, with a sound as if the spar had collided with something, almost threw them into the sea. It drew a cry of alarm from Gid and Mary. Dick wondered what new danger had befallen them!

CHAPTER XX.

THE OCEAN'S MORGUE.

"We've run into that big, black thing we saw when the moon was shinin'!" concluded Gid. "I guess it wasn't a ship, after all, or, anyway, nuthin' better than a coal barge."

Just then the moon shone out in her full splendor.

It was a ship they had collided with. She lay there silent on the sea, and not a sound came from the deck. A steamer of some size, with broken masts and a shattered funnel; and she lay very low.

They had struck her about the middle, and as the spar could go no further, it lay against the sides of the hull.

"Well, we can't be any worse off than we are," said Dick. "It is time we changed our boarding house, anyway," and making a leap, he scrambled up on board the steamer.

"It's all right," he said when he returned, after a few minutes. "We can't do better than to make the change," and he proceeded to help Gid and Mary on board.

"She can't have been abandoned long, everything seems new and fresh," said Mary, as they stood looking around them, wonderingly.

Dick ran here and there, examining everything.

"I hope he hasn't tumbled overboard," said Mary after a time, when Dick did not reappear.

Suddenly a light flashed out from a deck cabin near which they were seated. The next minute he came running toward them, gayly.

"We have struck it rich!" he cried. "Come in and make yourselves at home!"

They followed him into what must have been the ladies' cabin. It was handsomely furnished in mahogany, the walls lined with benches covered with red plush.

For some time they could only stare around in wonder. After their miserable experience on the spar, it seemed too good to be true.

"Sit down and make yourselves at home," said Dick, doing the honors.

They sank down on the plush cushions with a sigh of relief. "There ought to be a pantry near here," continued Dick, "for she hasn't been abandoned long, you can see."

The cabin showed that it had certainly been deserted in a hurry, for the few chairs were upset and several articles of female wearing apparel were tossed about, and there were even some paper-covered novels.

Dick returned in a few minutes with a smiling face, his arms full of various things, which he set down on the table after he had righted it. They proved to be cans of meat and beans and a tin of crackers. There was also a bottle of claret, which was promptly opened, for they were all more thirsty than hungry.

Then Dick opened the cans with his knife, and dispensing with forks and knives they all made a hearty meal, which cheered them up immensely.

"And there's lots more where this came from!" cried Dick. "So if the ship only keeps from sinking we won't suffer. Anyway, in the morning we may find one of her boats seaworthy, or at the worst, we can build a raft out of the doors and spars."

The poor castaways were in a hopeful mood now, and inclined to look on the brightest side. Never had anything tasted so good as the canned things Dick had discovered.

"Lands! I feel as if I don't care what happens!" said Gid, who had been stuffing himself until he was too sleepy to hold his head up, and finally collapsed on the plush cushions and was sound asleep almost before he could stretch himself out at full length.

Mary Welford, who, quite as curious as most of her sex, had been examining the surrounding cabins, appropriated a stateroom to herself. She was fortunate, too, in discovering a trunk full of female apparel, which she did not hesitate to annex. After being drenched by the salt water, and scorched by the sun, it was delightful to think that she could enjoy some of the refinements of life again.

Dick was too much excited to think of going to sleep, though he was worn out, and lay back on the cabin cushions listening to the soft, swishing sound of the sea, as it flowed against the hull of the vessel.

After the first delight of finding food, he began to wonder how long the vessel would keep afloat. He noticed she canted forward toward the bow, and supposed that there the damage lay. That there was water in the forward compartments he was sure.

"Well, what's the use of worrying until there's cause for it?" he said to himself, and straightaway fell asleep beside Gid.

The strange sound of a gong ringing aroused the lads in the morning. They had slept so soundly that it seemed but a few minutes since they had dropped on the cushions.

They both jumped to their feet with exclamations, and stared around them with astonished eyes, at first unable to make out where they were.

"Startle you, did I?" and they saw Mary Welford, attired in a neat dress she had borrowed from the trunk in the stateroom, standing in the doorway smiling at them.

"What's de gong for?" asked Gid, sleepily. "You busted one of the finest dreams I ever had."

"That was to call you to breakfast. I tried to wake you both, but nothing would arouse you."

"I don't know as we're fit to sit down with such a well-dressed young lady as you," said Dick, with a smile. "Come, Gid, let's see if there isn't a gent's furnishing department on this shebang."

They went out on deck and passed along until they came to a stateroom whose door swung invitingly open.

Gid hung back, but Dick made his way in, and came out in a moment, shaking his head.

"Nothing but women's togs all pitched about the floor."

They had better luck at a stateroom further on, where they found a fine assortment of men's clothes and underwear. There was nothing that fitted, but they were too glad to be dressed in dry and clean garments to be very particular.

Mary started with a cry when they entered the cabin. Dick wore a loud English check suit that must have been made for a short man with an aldermanic waist, while Gid sported a blue uniform trimmed with gold braid, the coat of which descended to his knees to meet trousers that resembled blue gunnybags.

Mary's alarm was only momentary, and then she burst out laughing.

As they took a look at themselves in the tall pier glass on one side of the cabin, they joined in the merriment.

"Say, we look like a song and dance team at Miner's Theayter," said Gid. "I tell ye we'd bring down the house if we were to go on in this make up," and they all had a fresh laugh.

Mary had spread a table in an adjoining room, and to their wonder, even produced a pot of coffee, which drew a howl of approval from her companions.

"However did you manage it?" gasped Dick, with his mouth full of fried ham.

"Oh, it was easy enough. I found an oil stove, and the rest was no trouble. Why, boys, there is actually ice on board, so, as you say, Dick, the ship can't have been long abandoned."

"It'll be a longer time 'fore we abandons her!" gurgled Gid, who was reaching right and left for everything eatable in sight. "Say, I ain't had a meal like this since I used to eat at Beefsteak John's."

There was little said after that, for eating was the most enticing work of the moment.

At last even Gid had to desist from his assault on the eatables.

"Now, I would like to find out where we are," said Dick, as he led the way to the deck.

"What's that matter?" replied Gid. "We're here, and if that ain't good enough for you, why you better change your boarding place. I've took rooms for the season."

The miserable trio, shivering on the spar, had suddenly changed under the influence of rest and food into quite a merry party. They were all young, and naturally light-hearted, and the past miseries were quickly forgotten.

It was a bright day without, but not a glimpse of water could be seen. On all sides stretched yellow plains of matted grass that looked solid enough to walk upon. It arose and fell and shifted to and fro, showing that there was water underneath; but otherwise there was nothing that resembled a sea about the appearance of their surroundings.

"Well, if we get tired o' bein' here we can get out and walk home," said Gid. "As for me, I'm very well off where I am."

"I only wish we could get out and walk, but you'd find that you'd sink down through weeds quickly enough before you had gone a dozen yards."

"Why, we do seem to be moving!" put in Mary Welford.

"That's the worst of it."

"Dick, what do you mean? Don't give us any conundrums so early in the mornin'; they don't set well on a feller's stummick," said Gid.

"I mean that we are caught in the current that brings in the wrecks and packs them together in the heart of the Sargasso Sea, and once in we should be mighty lucky if we ever got out."

"What an old croaker you are, anyway. I'm glad I don't know so much about things as you do!" replied Gid. "For then I'd be always lookin' ahead and making myself miserable."

Dick smiled and said no more. After all, nothing could be gained by frightening his companions. But he knew that they were drifting in toward a shadowy line in the distance that he felt sure was the wreck pack where lay the ships or what was left of them—those built in another century and the ships that were proudly plowing the sea a few short months ago.

There was plenty to interest them in searching through the vessel they were on. She seemed to have her bow stove in, but showed no signs of sinking. She must have been abandoned in a panic. They found the storerooms well filled and even some fresh meat in the refrigerating room. There was enough food to last them a year, if the steamer remained above water, which was some consolation.

Mary proved an excellent cook, and the dinner and supper were more appetizing even than the memorable breakfast.

It was at the evening meal that they were suddenly startled by a crashing sound.

"We've run into something!" said Dick, and left the table and dashed up on deck.

The sunset made the sky red as blood, and it was reflected on the strangest scene they had ever set their eyes on.

Massed around and about them were wrecks of all kinds in various stages of decay, and some towering above the water, apparently unharmed. Far and near stretched this vast morgue of wrecks.

The sunset touched their broken masts and funnels and shattered sides with a ruddy light. Some of the ships were of a modern model, while others represented the work of other days.

It was against one of these hulks that their vessel had collided.

They stood gazing at the peculiar spectacle with feelings of awe and wonder.

"We have reached the Haven of Lost Ships," said Dick. "Whatever enters it never comes out again!"

CHAPTER XXI.

IN THE STRANGE SEA.

Dick Henslow and his companions stood staring at the wreck pack in the strange sea for some moments in silence. It was a remarkable sight, which few living men had ever seen. For the wrecks seemed to extend for miles around, and there was something pathetic in the ruined hulls and shattered spars that told of many an ocean tragedy.

"Ugh!" exclaimed Gid, with a shiver, "and it's among those things that the ship lies where Captain Harwood was to look for the treasure?"

"Yes, somewhere lies the Spanish galleon he was trying to reach," replied Dick. "Poor fellow, I'm afraid he is where no treasure will do him any good."

The sun was sinking, and a breeze blowing from the wrecks seemed to fill the air with a musty odor, as of rotten wood.

"I'd rather look at this by daylight," said Mary Welford, with a shudder. "It's the saddest sight I ever saw. Let us go back to the cabin, where it is more cheerful."

The lads were quite willing to turn away from such a somber spectacle which cast a gloom over them.

As they were preparing to follow her she suddenly paused with a gesture of warning.

"Dick, do you hear anything?" she asked.

"Hear what?"

"I was sure I heard the faint sound of singing."

"Why, that is impossible. We are alone here, as if we were in a desert."

"Perhaps it was the wailing of the wind. But no, there it is again. Listen!"

Dick listened attentively, though he thought it must be the girl's fancy. In such surroundings it was easy to imagine anything.

He certainly did hear what resembled singing. It was some distance off, and sounded weird and creepy.

"Oh, I guess it's only the wind," he said, carelessly, not wishing to alarm his companions. "Let us go down in the cabin and not give way to the terrors. I guess there is nothing to fear in this sea. The wrecks are harmless enough."

Mary said nothing, but it was evident that she was only partly satisfied. She was a plucky girl, and did not want to be considered any less brave than the others.

Once in the cabin they recovered their spirits, for it was bright, even gay, there, with the light streaming over the scarlet cushions and the fine Oriental rugs on the floor.

Dick, however, was not so sure about that voice she thought she heard, and presently he took a lantern out of the pantry, lit it, and went on deck.

A fine mist was in the air, but not heavy enough to hide the moon that was just rising.

He did not turn in the direction of the wreck pack, having seen quite enough of that for one night, but approached the rail, looking toward the distant open sea.

He set down his lantern in the shadow of the bulwarks, and leaning over the side, listened for that weird sound he had heard a few moments before.

Was it the uneasy spirit of some drowned sailor moaning about a wreck where he had met his fate? Dick was not superstitious, but it gave him a shivery feeling to think of the thousands who

had perished in the vessels that lay rotting around them as far as the eye could reach.

It was not a comforting thought that they were being driven slowly into the heart of the sea, and that the steamer would become a part of that ocean graveyard.

All thoughts were driven out of his mind by the undeniable sound of a voice borne from the distance.

"No mistake about that!" he muttered. "What if it is some new wreck drifting in to join the others, and the voice I hear is one of the survivors?"

He listened, and the voice sounded more clearly. Then he could make out the words of a hoarse voice singing in English:

"Pass the grog, my messmates all,
We're th' chaps for the Cap'n's call.
The black flag waves, and our ship is trim,
Fill up yer can to the bloomin' brim!"

From the sound of the singer's voice, he had evidently been drinking several cans of grog.

"Whoever he is, he seems to be good-natured," muttered Dick to himself. "Perhaps we shan't be as lonely as we expected or hoped to be."

The sound of the singing ceased, and then a little later there was a confused jumble of other voices.

"Have a care, ye lubber, or you'll run something down!" suddenly roared out a voice that sent a shiver over Dick.

"Sawyer!" he exclaimed, recognizing only too well the voice of the mate of the *Water Sprite*.

The rival party had then reached the Sargasso Sea, and all poor Captain Harwood's efforts had been in vain.

Whether it was the *Water Sprite* that was approaching or not he could not make out, but he thought from the sound that it was a small boat.

It was not a pleasant thought that they were to be shut up in the strange sea with such human wolves.

While he did not want to frighten Gid and Mary, he thought it his duty to warn them, for Sawyer and his men seemed to be heading directly for the steamer.

Keeping his lantern down so that the light would not be seen above the bulwarks, he was making his way to the cabin when he met the pair.

"Then I wasn't mistaken? It was some one I heard singing?" said Mary.

"Yes, you were right."

"But why do you look so anxious?"

"I guess they won't hurt us any," said Gid.

"But it is Sawyer and his men of the *Water Sprite*."

"Then what are we to do?"

"I am in hopes they will pass us by."

He had hardly said this when a voice they knew to be Sawyer's was heard, it seemed only a few yards away.

"Ship ahoy! Do you want to run us down?"

"Too late!" muttered Dick. "I forgot all about those cabin lights."

He had not thought of the lamps in the deck cabin, that in the night must have shown the men in the boat that the cabin was occupied.

"Throw us a line, will ye?" called out Sawyer.

Dick dashed into the cabin, gathered together whatever food he could lay his hands on, bundled it into a shawl lying on the cushions, and then having put out the lights stepped out on deck again.

"What do you mean to do?" asked Mary, laying a trembling hand on his arm. "It seems to me as if they are trying to scramble on board."

"Well we must get away from here, at least until they are gone. They are a rough set, and owe us a grudge for belonging to Harwood's expedition."

"Too bad," she murmured, "and just when we thought we had found a refuge."

"Can't be helped! Perhaps they won't stay long, and we can come back. Think how it would fare with you among such rogues!"

She said no more after that, but followed him as he led the way to the other side of the ship.

"But couldn't we try and drive 'em off, if they wanted to board us?" ventured Gid.

"Yes, if we had any firearms, but there's only a revolver I picked up in one of the cabins, and they are fighters."

When they had reached the other side of the deck cabins, Dick called a halt.

"I hate to give up this comfortable berth until we have to!" said he. "Perhaps, after all, they may not try to come aboard when they find their hail was not answered."

"And if they do?"

"Well, we must make our way to the wreck that is jammed up against this, and then on until we find one fit to stay on until morning."

"Well, we are up against it, and no mistake!" grumbled Gid. "Roamin' around that old ships' graveyard by night."

"We can come back when those rascals have gone."

"Yes, if they ever go, but if they know a good thing when they see it, they will put up here for the rest of the season."

This talk, carried on in a low voice, was interrupted by a voice that sounded so near that the three started in alarm.

"Wake up, ye lubbers, and show yourselves! I wonder why they doused the glims so sudden like?"

Sawyer, the speaker, evidently addressed the last remark to a companion.

"I'm going to investigate this old ark," he added, and they could hear him stamping around on the other side of the deck.

"He has gone into the cabin!" said Dick, listening, and they could hear the sound of a door being flung violently open.

"They hain't gone far, whoever they be," was Sawyer's next words, as he stumbled out on deck again. "Been here few minutes ago, too, by the looks of things. Wonder what the terrapins went into hidin' fur? They orter be glad o' company in this God forsaken place! Scatter, boys, and look 'em up."

"Now we must go," said Dick, in a low voice, and with the lantern he still carried he led the way to the bulwarks, after giving Mary the provisions he had snatched up hastily when he ran out of the cabin. Sad enough were they to leave the place they already felt at home in, but there was no help for it.

While looking out on the wreck pack that evening Dick had noticed a projecting spar, from the nearest wreck, that almost overlapped the deck of the steamer, and it was to this he helped the others. Fortunately, his companions were not helpless, but could manage pretty well for themselves in such an emergency.

Mary, however, got her dress caught in a splinter of the spar, which drew from her a cry of alarm.

It must have been heard by the sailors on the deck of the steamer, for there was a rush of feet, and the scene was lit by half a dozen lanterns.

"Never mind them!" exclaimed Dick, as he helped his companions to the deck of the wreck.

"After them, ye lubbers!" cried Sawyer. "They must have a good reason for wantin' to git away."

The next moment several dark forms were scrambling along the spar in pursuit of the fleeing trio.

"I must drop the lantern," said Dick. "It will show them where to follow," and he flung the lantern out as far as he could, hearing it crash against a wreck.

"If the moon would only disappear," he groaned, as he helped the others along.

It was no easy matter to make their way through the pack in such a dim light, and the only marvel was that they did not sink through some of the rotten decks that felt like sponge to the feet. Finally, after they had gone some distance, Dick started back in dismay, for there was a gap between the ship and the nearest wreck that it was impossible for them to reach, and they heard the sailors close at their heels, saw the flash of the lanterns, and knew that they were hemmed in, and that there was no escape.

Sawyer and his men were laughing and jesting, as if they found the chase fine sport.

Dick, in his quest of a refuge, did not look where he was going, suddenly felt something give way beneath him, and then the sight of the moon was blotted out.

CHAPTER XXII.

DICK IN DESPAIR.

Dick reached out his hands wildly in the hopes of staying his fall, but whatever he touched crumbled in his grasp.

It seemed to him that it was hours before his descent was checked, and so abruptly that he saw more stars than were ever recorded by the astronomers.

He felt sure that he had stepped through a hole in the rotten deck of the ship. The marvel was that he had broken no bones; but that must have been because everything about the wreck was soft as punk, and offered no resistance.

It was a damp, musty-smelling place in which he found himself. The floor seemed covered with a fungus, or moss, and he shuddered as his hands touched it, as if he were handling a snake.

There was no light in the place, but a little pale moonlight that filtered down through the hole above his head.

"I wonder what has become of Gid and Mary?" he said to himself, as he scrambled to his feet. "It would be too bad if they had fallen into the hands of those ruffians. I must get out of here and see what has become of them."

It was easier to get down than it was to get out, for, feeling around, his hands only encountered slippery walls dripping with moisture. Suddenly, as he was examining his prison, a light flashed down, and he had just time to draw back against the walls when he heard a rough voice call out:

"If he dropped down here, he must have broke his neck. More likely the hull three of 'em walked overboard in the dark."

"Better go down and see, and don't take anything for granted." This time it was Sawyer who was speaking.

"Ye couldn't get me to go down inter that pit, that must be full of ghosts and the bones of dead people, for a year's pay!" replied the sailor, stubbornly.

"A nice lot of cowards I have to deal with!" growled the mate, with an oath. "Here's a line. Tie it to your lantern, and then lower it down to the bottom."

"Oh, I'll do that."

Dick retreated into the shadows, where he knew they could not see him, and presently he perceived the lantern, looking very spectral and burning blue in the damp air, lowered until it rested on the floor.

"Anything there?" asked Sawyer.

"Nuthin' but muck and moss, and rotten planks."

"Then we are on the wrong track. Well, that will do. We can't be spending the night here. Perhaps they did walk overboard."

Then the lantern was hauled up again, and Dick heard their retreating steps.

He was satisfied now, from what the men had said, that in some way Gid and the girl had escaped their clutches.

There was a fear in his heart that they might have stepped overboard in the dark, for it seemed impossible that they could have avoided being seen by the sailors.

He was anxious now to get out of the hole into which he had tumbled and ascertain what had become of them. Moreover, the air of the place, fetid and musty, made him feel faint. For all he knew, too, the wreck might be in a sinking condition, for it seemed hard to believe such a soft and spongy structure, crumbling with rottenness, could keep long afloat.

The thing was how to get out? To attempt to climb such slippery walls was out of the question.

During the few seconds that the lantern had rested on the floor, he had, in looking around his prison, seen some poles resting against the side of the wreck, and, after feeling around for some time in the dark, he seized hold of one. He brought it forward beneath the opening through which he had fallen, and raised it.

He had hardly got it in place, and was about to climb it, when, to his disgust, it went to pieces in his hand.

"This is getting mighty serious!" he muttered. "I—I can't get out of here! I'll starve to death!"

Meanwhile he stood staring up at the hole above his head, through which the pale moonlight was streaming, wondering how he was ever to reach that one way to freedom.

"Maybe there is another way of getting out of here," casting a glance into the shadows beyond toward the bow of the ship. "I'll have to risk it and go slow, or I may walk into a hole and drop into the sea."

He had a box of matches with him, and the stump of a candle. He lit the latter, and then, not without a shudder of apprehension, made his way slowly toward the bow, if, indeed, there was any bow left to the wreck.

It was not so dark as he expected, after he had passed out of the faint moonlight. The rotten wood gave out a phosphorescent glow, and lit the interior of the ship with a pale radiance.

She seemed to be a very old ship, and still stanch in parts. Presently he came into a small room, which, as he examined it

by the light of a candle, must have been where one of the officers slept; for on a table in the center lay an old chart, falling to pieces. On the walls hung some rusty swords and blunderbusses of antique design. He did not dare look in the direction of the bunks along the wall.

The air was so hard to breathe here that he hastened to leave the place, which seemed peopled with ghosts of the past.

Passing out, he stumbled over something on the floor, and, stooping down, by the light of his candle, he saw that it was a skeleton. The skull still bore some scraps of wool-like hair clinging to it. One foot seemed to be caught in a rope attached to the wall. It was the skeleton of a negro, but what was she or he doing there? Could it be that the miserable wretch had been tied up for some offense, and when the panic came, and the ship was abandoned, left there, forgotten, to perish?

He made his way rapidly from this dreadful object, feeling sick. A little further on a shaft of moonlight greeted him. It came from a square opening above, and, to his delight, there was an iron ladder leading up to it.

Though many of the rusty rungs gave way, he managed to reach the top, eager to breathe the fresh air again, and to get away from that dreadful interior and its melancholy skeleton.

"But Gid and Mary, where shall I look for them?" he said to himself. He sat down for a moment to rest on the hatchway, and to recover from the faintness that had struck him in the chart-room below.

He did not dare call out, for fear he should be heard by the sailors on the steamer. Perhaps some of them might be lingering still about the wreck.

He could not resist the desire, though, to try and ascertain what had become of them. So, after a time, he made his way cautiously around the deck, calling in a low voice, which he felt sure could not reach Sawyer and his men.

He thought he had searched the place thoroughly, when he stumbled over a bundle on the deck. It was the shawl which he had filled with provisions and given into Mary's keeping.

"She must have dropped it when she was fleeing from those rogues," he muttered. "Well, I'll hold onto it, for I may need it," and he arranged the bundle so as to carry it on his back like a knapsack, and so leave his arms free.

"Well, they are certainly not here," was his inward thought, after he had peered into every nook and corner above deck.

He feared the worst, for how could they manage to get away alone, without his help?

A sudden noise from the direction of the steamer made him think that perhaps Sawyer and his men were returning. There was no use of his remaining on the hulk any longer, and he might as well look to his own safety.

He saw moving lanterns beyond, and made up his mind to go, for in making his way about the deck he had perceived a wreck so near that it could be reached by the use of some agility.

If they had only discovered it when they first came aboard the hulk, how differently things might have turned out!

He made his way cautiously toward this wreck, clambered up on the bowsprit, and dropped, exhausted, on the other side.

It was a much better, newer boat than the one he had just left, and he resolved to stay there until the morning, for he did not want to leave the locality before he had given up all hope of finding his young friends.

It was a brig on which he found himself, and the deck seemed sound underfoot, and not like the hulk he had just left. Her spars had gone by the board, and she sagged in the stern, to show that there the damage lay, but otherwise her woodwork seemed still sound. Looking back in the direction of the steamer, he no longer saw any moving lanterns, and concluded that Sawyer's men were not starting again for the hulk.

He dropped down on a tattered sail that covered one of the hatchways, and felt utterly worn out. He was glad enough to have some provisions to fall back on, though there was no water or wine to wash down the crackers and tinned meats.

"Poor Gid—poor Mary!" was his last thought, and then fell into a sound sleep, so sound as to resemble unconsciousness.

CHAPTER XXIII.

"SO NEAR AND YET SO FAR."

Dick awoke in the morning, chilled by the heavy dew which had fallen during the night. As he looked around him at the glistening deck, his glance rested for a moment on the shawl in

which he had stowed his provisions, and he was surprised to see the improvised sack moving in a peculiar way.

He rubbed his eyes, to see if he was not still in the land of dreams. He was beginning to think that the excitement he had recently passed through had unsettled his mind, when out of the shawl stepped a little, ragged dog, resembling an animated doormat.

He was licking his chops, to show that he had been making free with the provisions, but he had such a roguish look in his bright eyes, as he came up wagging a stump of a tail, that Dick could not help laughing.

"Well, you poor little runt, I don't want to be hard with you for stealing our breakfast, for if ever a dog deserved it, you do," patting him on the head.

Certainly the dog, Crusoe, must have led a lonely life among the wrecks, and he seemed to be delighted to make Dick's acquaintance, barking and gamboling about him, as if he would jump out of his skin for joy.

Though he looked like a mop, the dog was bright and intelligent, and our hero did not begrudge him his meal. In that lonely graveyard of lost ships it was a comfort to have even an animal friend. The poor beast looked as if he had not lived very high among the wrecks, though there should have been provisions enough, had he known how to get at them.

After the ragged stranger had testified his gratitude for his breakfast in a doggyish way, he ran along the deck, with loud barks, as if inviting his new-found friend to follow him.

Dick knew enough of dog language to understand what was wanted, and was in a mood to accept the invitation, for he wanted to look over the ship.

The dog seemed to want to do the honors of the place, leading the way, and stopping now and then to look back to see if Dick was following him.

Suddenly he stopped before an open hatchway, and began to bark furiously. Out of idle curiosity, Dick peered down into the dark interior, and it seemed to him that he heard the sound of footsteps moving about cautiously below.

"Well, this is strange!" he said to himself, as he drew back. "The dog must have a friend down there he wants to introduce me to. Maybe another dog left behind when the ship was abandoned."

The terrier, thinking Dick was going away, tugged at his trousers, as if to hold him back, and then returned to his place on the edge of the hatch to renew his barks.

"I guess I'll have to look into this," muttered Dick, and, approaching the hole, he leaned over, and called out, loudly:

"Ship ahoy! Anybody down there?"

He had forgotten that he might be heard by Sawyer and his men on the steamer.

"Glory hallelujah!" yelled a voice from the depths. "Come out here, Mary, and show yourself, and don't stop to think! It's Dick!"

And then the homely, good-natured face of Gid Crossly loomed up in the darkness below, and close beside him Mary Welford's pale and graceful features.

"Don't yell so!" said Dick, warningly, looking over in the direction of the steamer. "Want Sawyer's men to come here?"

"Hang everybody! Who cares? I don't," and Gid began a shuffle on the floor. "We've got you, and that's enough."

"But how did you get down there?"

"Wait till we get up, and then we'll tell you. Here, catch!" and out of the gloom came flying a rope ladder.

Dick said no more, but made it fast, and the next minute they were hugging each other rapturously, even Mary coming in for a share in the general enthusiasm.

"Got anything to eat?" asked Gid.

"Lots of it, but tell me first what you were doing down there?"

"Not a word till I have a bite."

It was only when they were seated on the sunny side of the cabin that young Mr. Crossly consented to open his lips, and that was only after the first pangs of hunger were satisfied.

"Well, ye see," he began, "we sort of lost you in the dark, and when I made out the bowsprit of this wreck stickin' out so handy, I was sure you must have got aboard her. So I helped Mary up, nearly breaking my neck, and we clambered aboard. The first thing we did was to hunt a lodgin'. We found the hatch open, and the rope ladder here, and went down into the shivery place. Ugh!" shuddering at the memory. "Somehow, the blamed lad-

der fetched loose, landin' me on my back. There we were in a place like a tunnel, with no hopes of gettin' out again and nothin' to eat. Early this mornin', just as we was makin' up our minds to eat each other, that little dog showed up. He was mighty friendly, but said he couldn't do nothin' for us, much to his sorrow."

The dog was all this time capering around as if he understood he was the subject of conversation.

"Well, that's all there is to it," continued Gid, as he made a fresh attack on the provisions.

"Well, we must give the dog a vote of thanks, for it was owing to him that I found you," said Dick, as he related his part of the story.

"Vote o' thanks be hanged!" exclaimed the ex-newsboy. "He'd rather have a raw beefsteak any day, and by the Lord Harry! if we ever get out of this second-hand ship shop, he shall have it, too!" as he patted the ragged dog on the head, with rough affection.

"Well," said Dick, "we are all together again. Thank God for that! I was never so dreadfully lonely in my life as when I thought I had lost you!"

"We'd better tie ourselves together after this, so we won't lose each other."

"I don't want to lose you, anyway, for you come back with such an appetite!" replied Dick, as he looked ruefully at the contents of the shawl.

"There ought to be plenty more where that came from."

"There may be, but we may have to travel far to find it. Most of the ships are so old that what provisions they have on board have long ago spoiled."

"But the steamer? You think Sawyer's men are there yet?"

"Suppose we go and find out, for I'm dying of thirst," said Dick. "Then perhaps one of us had better go ahead and see."

So saying, he slipped away, delighted to be of service to the friends he feared he never would see again.

"Well, what are you lookin' so blue about?" asked Gid, when he returned after a short absence. "Have they gone?"

"Oh, no doubt about their having gone," gloomily.

"Well, what then?"

"The steamer's gone, too. That is, all but one of her masts is above water. She has sunk."

"Lands! And all those victuals gone to feed the fishes!" groaned Gid. "What a free lunch for the finny folks!"

"Yes, and we may travel far before we find such another larder."

"And the walkin' is mighty bad. Hello, Mary! What troubles you? See any roast ducks flying about in the air?" for she was staring up at the sky.

"Thunder and cat's feathers! The flying ship!" looking in the same direction. "Mr. Johnston, let me loose!"

The flying ship was sweeping through the air a great distance above where they were standing.

"Now, Gid, yell!" exclaimed Dick, excitedly. "Everybody yell, for I believe she doesn't see us."

The trio made as much noise as they could, but it must have been that their voices could not reach so far, or they were hoarse from the dampness; anyway, the flying ship passed on its way, until it became a mere speck in the distance, and then faded from view.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE WEARY WAY.

Imagine, if you can, the feelings of Dick and his companions when, standing on the deck of the wreck, they saw the flying ship disappear in the distance!

Mary Welford looked ready to burst into tears, and as for Gid Crossly, there were signs of quivering about his mouth that showed he was bravely trying to keep from whimpering.

They stood, a melancholy group, looking off in the direction the ship had taken, as if they half expected to see it appear again.

"Well, I did think we were all right," groaned Gid, "when the old ship hove in sight that we thought was wrecked long ago," and he made a vicious kick at the little dog gamboling about his feet, to show his irritation. "They must have been all asleep, not to hear that yell we let off. Why, it was loud enough to wake a policeman!"

"But how do we know that Captain Harwood was on board?" said Dick.

"What do ye mean?"

"The captain and the engineer may have been wrecked, and the ship become the possession of other people. Any engineer that knew his business could have managed her, for there was a book of instructions in the covered car, given Harwood by the inventor, and, for all I know, information about the treasure, and how to reach it."

"That might be," muttered Gid, shaking his head; "but it don't mend matters any, that I can see. To be so blamed near it, and then to slip up, is enough to make a brass monkey swear!"

"Well, there is no use our standing here and groaning," replied Dick. "We have a lot to do, unless we want to starve to death, and who knows but we may come across the ship again? It is not likely that it will leave the neighborhood for some time."

This remark gave the others some hope, and seemed to cheer them up at once. Dick did not add that, as the Sargasso Sea was as big as a continent, the ship might run back and forth for weeks without ever coming in hailing distance of them.

"What do you mean to do?" asked Gid.

"Hunt up a comfortable wreck, that doesn't look as if she would go to the bottom any minute, like the last, and where we can find some provisions. I hope you two feel strong and lively, and ready to climb and travel?"

"My joints need oilin', after that night in the damp hold," said Gid, "but I guess I can keep from fallin' in the sea."

"Perhaps we can find something in the way of food aboard this old hulk. We may as well have a look. We don't know when we may strike a well-filled pantry."

The three scattered, to search for provisions, but, apart from a tin of musty crackers, there was nothing else.

"May as well give it up; we are only wasting time," called Dick to the others, and, when they joined him, said: "The fact is, the eatables, I think, are all in the sunken part, under water. We may as well get out of this at once."

He had found a good telescope in one of the cabins, and, having adjusted it, took a look at the wreck pack.

"We want to aim for one of the newest looking ships, and I see a black funnel of a steamer, with a red top, off there to the right," pointing in the direction. "Suppose we try and reach that?"

"All wrecks look alike to me," said Gid, who had recovered his spirits.

"But how are we going to manage the dog?"

"He'll have to manage himself. He looks smart enough to lead the expedition."

"We may as well give him a name, as he's now one of the party. If he ever had a name, I guess he's forgotten it."

"Well, suppose we call him Rags?" said Dick.

"That'll suit him to a dot. Here, Rags, get a gait on you."

The bright-eyed terrier winked his bright eyes, and did not seem displeased at his title. As they were clambering over to the nearest wreck, he showed his intelligence by perching on Gid's shoulders, barking loudly, as if he enjoyed the situation.

It would be tedious to relate the various wrecks they crossed, not without difficulty, on their way to reach the steamer with the red-topped funnel.

A melancholy sight some of them were, the last remains of once noble ships. Sometimes only a spar could be seen above the weeds to show where a ship had sunk. They were in all stages of decay. Here a bow was lifted above the water, the body being out of sight. Every variety of sailing ship and steamer was represented in that dismal assemblage. Most of them were of antique design, though here and there might be detected something modern.

They stood there, grim monuments of countless lives lost at sea, and even the three young people could not help but feel moved at the sight of such majestic ruins.

There was one ship they were glad to get away from in particular. It was a wooden battleship, almost sunken to the gunwale in the ooze, and about the deck, among rusty swords and guns, lay whitened skeletons, to which faded rags were still clinging.

Though they examined the ships in the best state for provisions, they found only cans of spoiled and weevily biscuits.

It was impossible to attempt to reach the steamer they were aiming for without going a roundabout way, since they had to take the nearest wrecks that were within reach. For this reason

they found themselves, after what must have been an hour's hard travel, as far away from the red-topped funnel as when they started.

The sun was very hot, and finally, when they reached a wreck with a tolerably sound deck, Dick called a halt.

"We may as well rest a while, and take things as easy as we can, or we shall all be done up before we reach the steamer."

They sat down on the top of a covered hatch, utterly worn out by the wearisome work of scrambling over slippery spars and crumbling bulwarks.

"I know one thing—I'm gettin' hungry," said Gid, as he wiped the perspiration from his forehead.

"That's chronic with you," replied Dick. "We'll have to fill you up with cement, or we won't have any provisions left."

"Can't help it. I was born that way. The dinner bell is always ringing in my stomach."

"Well, here's a cracker," handing him one from their slender store of provisions; "and don't let's hear another word out of you for an hour, at least."

"Can't blame me if I was built hollow all over," replied Gid, as he took the cracker and began to munch on it contentedly.

This bantering talk between the lads was disturbed by a peculiar sound that, heard in the silence of the sea, aroused their attention. They looked at each other in wonder, as if asking an explanation.

"What do you make o' that?" asked Gid.

"Don't ask conundrums. It sounds like the rush of steam. There's a churning noise, too, like a screw turning."

"My, my! What if it should be a steamer makin' its way in here!" exclaimed Gid, with enthusiasm.

"No fear of that, Gid. It couldn't make its way through the matted grass, without some means could be found of cutting a passage."

The sound, as of escaping steam, became more distinct.

"I think we had better get out of sight until we see what this thing is," said Dick. "Come over here," leading the way to the bulwark, where a hole would offer them a good chance to view what was approaching without being seen.

They crouched down out of sight behind the wooden barrier, and looked off on a vast stretch of tangled weeds, while the noise they had heard grew every moment louder.

"Ye can't tell me that ain't a steamer!" exclaimed Gid. "Goes just like them tugs on the East River."

"Hush up!" said Dick, warningly. "We shall soon know what it is."

They all felt intensely excited, for, if it was really a steamer, rescue was at hand, and they need no longer worry about the food supply, or the future.

Presently out of the shadow of a wreck on their right appeared a queer-looking boat of some kind. It was about thirty feet long, and smoke was puffing out of the small funnel. What puzzled Dick was a peculiar, low-shaped arrangement about the bows, the like he had never seen before, and which moved up and down, with a chopping movement.

It did not take him long to understand the meaning of this.

So far, they did not catch sight of any one on board the craft, for the peculiar arrangement in the bows hid them from sight.

"Well, do you know any more than you did before?" asked Gid.

"Lots; it's a steam launch, and that arrangement in front is to cut the way through the weeds. If it wasn't for that they couldn't go a yard."

"The dickens! They couldn't take us aboard that pill box!" replied Gid, disgustedly. "That wouldn't do to go to sea in."

"Perhaps you wouldn't want to get aboard her, anyway," said Dick, significantly, for he had his suspicions.

The launch was now near enough for them to catch sight of the occupants, and they caught the sound of a rough voice that gave Dick a start.

"It's Sawyer!" he exclaimed. "Well for us we kept out of sight!"

So the facts proved, for, when they had a side view of the launch and its occupants, they had a glimpse of the red face of the mate of the *Water Sprite*, and the villainous features of the deserter from the flying ship, Siggins.

The launch passed so near them that they could hear what was being said on board. The sailors seemed to be almost in a state of mutiny.

"How are we to find the ship by any chart," one grumbled, "when these here wrecks must be a-changing all the time?"

"Never you mind; I know what I'm about," replied Sawyer, with an oath. "And talk more respectful, you dog! unless you want to be filled with lead!"

The sailor relapsed into silence, and then the launch was lost sight of by the trio behind another wreck.

"I'm glad we didn't fall in their way," said Dick, as they came out of the protecting shadow of the bulwark. "We must keep a keen lookout for those ruffians after this. It's a pity they didn't go down when the steamer sank. Well, now, as you all must be rested, we must go on. All the morning spent, and yet we haven't reached the boat. We must make the most of the daylight, for I don't want to spend the night hungry on one of these rotten hulks."

They resumed their weary journey from wreck to wreck, now and then cheered by the prospects of reaching the steamer with the red funnel, only to be forced to change the route owing to the open spaces of weed-topped sea that could not be crossed.

"This is like a Chinese puzzle," said Dick, who was more tired than he cared to acknowledge. "Perhaps if we zigzag around enough in a circle we may find the way open to reach that old boat."

They were forced to take frequent rests now, and the afternoon was far advanced, and found them still on their way.

As they had climbed wearily onto the deck of a bark, Dick suddenly drew out his spyglass, and cast an anxious glance through it.

"I believe we have lost sight of that ship," letting his hand fall, "though I saw it only a moment ago."

"Well, keep on, anyway," was Gid's remark. "She'll come in sight again, or mebbe somethin' just as good."

They had none of them any desire to renew acquaintance with the melancholy hulks they had already passed over, so on they went.

Matters were getting desperate, for in one of the scrambles they had lost their stock of provisions, and were, moreover, devoured with thirst, aggravated by the hot sun.

"Cheer up," said Gid, who was in advance of the rest, and now returned, with a smile on his face. "There's a fine-looking steamer, clean as paint, just on ahead. A reg'lar Waldorf-As-toria of a ship, and it'll be queer if we don't get a good tuckout aboard of her."

The others pressed forward eagerly, and found that Gid was right. Beyond a ruined brigantine they saw a glistening, black funnel, that looked as if it might have been painted the day before. There was even a smart blue flag flying from the peak.

"Hurrah!" cried the irrepressible Gid. "Come on, gents; this dinner is on me!"

"Don't make so much noise!" remonstrated Dick. "You forget the launch," but he felt a good deal like yelling hurrah himself.

It was hardly possible that such a clean-looking ship would be without provisions, though it was curious to find her wedged in among so many relics of the past.

They forgot all their weariness, and the long journey in the sun, when they alighted on the clean, white deck of the steamer, which stood so high in the water that it must have been deserted in a panic.

They all made a dash for the companionway, and down the stairs, where they found a commodious dining-room, the table already spread, as if the passengers must have left it in a hurry at the time of the panic.

"Wait until I see what there is in the larder," said Dick, as he went aft. "There is no need of putting up with those stale things," pointing to the food that was on the table, and which certainly did not send forth a very appetizing odor.

By the time he returned, Mary had cleared off the remains of the meal, and pitched it out of the porthole.

"We are certainly it!" said Dick, running back. "Come, Gid; there's fresh meat and ice to be had."

The lads went out together, to return presently with smiling faces, and their arms filled with bottles of wine and potted meats and bread.

Dick knocked off the tops of a couple of bottles of claret, for the first thing was to satisfy their thirst.

"Oh, my, never did anything taste so good!" gurgled Gid.

Then they sat down to a repast of sardines and potted meats, which they dispatched in an astonishingly short time.

"Spose ye invite me an' my mates to jine ye?" exclaimed a voice, and, turning, they saw the red and grinning face of Sawyer looking at them from the doorway.

CHAPTER XXV.

AMONG THE WRECKS.

"Try and get up on deck by the other way," said Dick to Mary, in a cautious voice, as at the same time he drew his pistol and aimed it at the mate of the *Water Sprite*.

She took the hint, and, at a word to Gid, they ran out through the farther door of the dining-room. Dick had glanced one moment to see that they were gone, and then faced the mate again.

Sawyer smiled at him.

"You wouldn't hurt me, would you, my bantam cock?" and he advanced.

"Stand back!" cried Dick. "If you know what is good for you!"

"Bah! Don't be a fool!" still advancing.

Dick had not noticed that one of the sailors crowding behind the mate when he first appeared in the doorway had slipped forward on his hands and knees, under the protection of the long table, and now rising up suddenly, sent the pistol spinning out of our hero's hand.

"I told you not to be foolish!" grinned Sawyer. "Stand by the door, Siggins, and knock him down if he tries to run for it. Wait until I have a drink, and then we can talk business," said the mate, as he reached for a bottle of wine, poured himself out a tumblerful and drained it at a draught.

"Bah! That sour stuff; how can you drink it?" with a grimace. Then, turning to one of the sailors, said: "Juggins, go and nail the boy and the girl, though this young man is the one we have to do business with."

The sailor departed on his mission. Dick hoped that by this time they would have got away, unless they lost their heads. He was more interested in what became of them than about his own fate.

"Well, me young treasure-seeker, ye thought ye would get ahead of us, didn't ye?"

Dick sat down, and was silent.

"Yer a plucky snipe, I must say, but too spry to be left to roam around in the region of the treasure. What's become of Captain Harwood, d'ye know?"

Dick thought it best to try and conciliate the ruffian, for nothing was to be gained by being surly.

"The last time I saw Captain Harwood he was carried off in his ship by a tornado, and perhaps wrecked. We landed on an island, in the hopes of getting water, and it was then the storm broke and carried him away."

"I believe you are speaking the truth," said the mate, eying him with a keen glance.

"It's a habit I have."

"Well, I won't ask how you came to be here, because I don't care. You made a skip from the *Water Sprite* because you didn't want to tell the cap'n what you knew of the treasure."

"I couldn't tell him anything, because I didn't know anything."

"So you said then, but nobody believed you. But tell me now, won't you?" with a piercing look that was full of hidden meaning.

"No, not you, for I know nothing."

"What!" springing to his feet, with an oath. "Are you going to brave me—me!" and his red face became purple with anger.

It was just at this juncture that Dick felt something hard beneath his feet. It was the pistol that had been dashed from his hand a moment before. He smiled, and the mate, thinking the smile was because of his threats, grew angrier still.

He arose and made his way over to where Dick was seated.

"I am a law to myself on this sea!" he cried, shaking a fist in Dick's face. "You'll find that I will not put up with your dideoes! Understand? Here," turning around, "get a rope! That one around your waist will do," to the one of the sailors, who had a cord, for a belt, twisted about him.

Whatever else Sawyer would have said, Dick will never know, for, with a dexterous sweep of his foot, he sent the mate sprawling to the floor, picked up the pistol at his feet, and, cocking it, made a dash for the door.

"Stop him, Siggins!" roared the mate. But Siggins did not like the look of the pistol, or the determined expression in the eyes of the one who carried it, and so slunk away.

Dick passed out, closed the door behind him, and bolted it.

"Out of the way!" yelled Dick, now thoroughly aroused, as the

sailor who was on deck appeared at the head of the companionway, summoned by the cries of the mate.

As he didn't obey quickly enough, Dick sent a shot flying over his head. The man vanished, as if he had been let through a trap, and the road was clear.

"Gid! Mary! Where are you?" he called out, for he knew that the door leading to the dining-room would not long withstand attack.

"Here we are!" and Mary and Gid suddenly issued from a stateroom on the deck, where they had taken refuge.

"We must clear out of here! Not a moment to lose!" gasped Dick.

Then, as he glanced up and down the deck, he suddenly caught sight of smoke coming up from the side of the ship.

"Ah, the launch!"

He hurried them to the side of the ship, and there, sure enough, lay the queer little steamboat.

"Down the ladder with you, and wait for me!" he said, peremptorily.

As they started to obey, he ran back to the door that opened on the companionway, and closed it with a bang. There was a bolt of some size, which he shot just in time to hear the door below broken open.

With a leap, he was back to where the launch was moored. Steam was up, and he knew enough of machinery to start the engine.

Then back to the tiller; he jammed it down hard, and the little boat, slowly at first, but, gaining speed, made for the open.

They had been none too fast in getting her under way, for now a head appeared above the bulwarks—then another.

"Lie down in the bottom, both of you!" yelled Dick, at the same time dropping down himself, but keeping an outstretched hand on the tiller.

"Fire on them! Don't you see the young fools are running away!" roared Sawyer, and shots fell thick and fast about the launch. "Fire lower, ye lubbers!" as the shots were rattling over the heads of Dick and his companions.

Dick still kept his hand on the tiller, despite the shots, and, as the sailors were wide of the mark, the little launch was soon out of range.

They had now passed out of sight of the steamer and its dangerous occupants, when Dick suddenly started up, with an exclamation.

They were just at the back of a ship that reared its stern, high as a house, above their heads.

It was a curious structure, with a great lantern hanging above the windows of its richly gilded stern, carved in many curious designs and picked out in red and gold.

"Well, what is up now?" asked Gid.

"Look at the name!" said Dick, pointing to a pane above the broken windows of the old ship.

"Well, I'm a-lookin', but I don't see nothin'!"

"It's the *Santa Anna*."

"Well, what of it?"

"It's the treasure ship that Captain Harwood was looking for!" said Dick Henslow.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE FLYING SHIP AT LAST.

There was enough aboard the launch in the way of provisions to last them for some days, so they had time to mount the vast bulwarks of the *Santa Anna* and see if, indeed, the treasure was on board.

Dick found the deck in a state of crumbling ruins, and so it was necessary to tiptoe gently around, in order to avoid falling into the hold.

In the fore part of the ship, which still remained above water, in spite of its great age, he saw many curious, rusty weapons of other days.

"Funny we should be the first to stumble on this very ship that Captain Harwood was looking for!" he said to Gid. "It surely is the unexpected that happens."

"I guess what treasure there is, is in the stern—what's sunk," said Gid. "Anyway, what's the good of any gold to us if we can't get out of this here bloomin' sea?"

"I'm going to find out, anyway, whether it was all a fairy idea or not," replied Dick, sturdily. "We have found the *Santa Anna*, and I propose to find what she contains."

"If it was on'y suthin' to eat," remarked Gid. "But I ain't thinkin' nothin' o' treasure. All I'd like would be to get back on Park Row, and me 'Extrays' would be enough for me."

"Just hold your horses a while, Gid, and maybe you will be back on Park Row with more money than you will know what to do with."

"I wouldn't mind tryin' to see what I could do with too much money. Say, Dick, where are ye goin'?" as the latter disappeared into one of the ruined passages.

They heard a yell from him a moment later, whether of pain or not they could not determine.

Their minds were relieved when, a moment later, he scrambled up on deck.

"Well, ye look as if yer uncle had left ye a fortune," said Gid, at the sight of his smiling face.

"No uncle of mine could ever leave such a fortune as this!" said Dick. "I tell you, Gid and Mary, that there is at least five million in gold below, if we only knew how to get it away from here!"

"You found the treasure?" asked Mary Welford.

"I found a room packed with ingots of gold, and I dare say there is more in other parts of the ship."

"Why wasn't they loaves of bread?" remarked Gid; but even he was moved at the thought of the millions that they now possessed and yet could put to no service.

"What we ought to do would be to get the ingots up on deck, and then, perhaps, we might have the luck to sight the flying ship again," said Dick. "If that fails, why, then, we can cut our way to the sea in the launch, and perhaps fall in with a passing ship."

"Fall in with a passin' tornado, like the last, is more likely," grumbled Gid; but at the same time he was willing to work, and soon out of a lower room they had raised the ingots, that looked black as iron until they were cut, when a shining giint of gold was to be seen.

It was hard work, and they only stopped when some hundreds of the ingots lay on the galleon's deck. As they paused to wipe their foreheads, Gid remarked, in a grumpy mood:

"What's the good of all this when we can't eat it?"

"Gid, you think of eating, and nothing else. We'll find a way to transport this wealth out of the Sargasso Sea. A couple of Yankee boys ought to be equal to that."

"Well, when you put it in that light," said Gid, "you can count on me. But, just the same, I'd rather have that steamer, where Sawyer trun us down, than all th's here gold."

The conversation was interrupted by the sound of voices near at hand, and Dick said: "Get out of sight, everybody, for I really believe that Sawyer and his gang have found our trail again!"

They dodged behind an old pent-house, first seeing that Mary Welford was safe, and then peered out.

The voices they had heard came from a neighboring wreck, but as yet there was no one to be seen.

A moment, and they heard the recognized voice of Sawyer, roaring in his accustomed way.

Then Dick said:

"Make for the boat, good people!" They slipped out into the open deck, without yet sighting a soul.

"And what about them things?" asked Gid, pointing to the ingots.

"We'll try and take them with us," said Dick. "You get into the launch, and I'll pass 'em to you."

Gid did as requested, and in twenty minutes the last blackened bar of gold was stowed away in the after part of the launch.

"Come on, men! I hear voices; they must be near here!" yelled Sawyer, who had not yet appeared in view.

"Stand by the tiller for the open," said Dick, as he busied himself about the gasoline engine, and the little boat cut its way through the weedy sea, just as Sawyer and a couple of sailors appeared on a neighboring wreck.

"Down with you all!" cried Dick, and they dropped to the bottom of the boat.

They were in a great state of perturbation.

The launch was suddenly arrested by striking something that was yielding, and Dick, looking up, saw the flying ship resting on the bosom of the strange sea.

"Dick!"

"Captain Harwood!"

And they clasped each other in a fond embrace.

"The gold of the *Santa Anna*—it is all there in the launch!" gasped Dick; but Gid was already pitching the ingots into the car of the flying ship.

"Turn the gatling gun on that noisy man!" said Captain Harwood to the engineer, for Sawyer, on a distant wreck, was swearing and abusing his men on account of their bad aim.

"We have not got the whole treasure, but the best of it," said Dick, as the gatling gun sent their foes scattering.

"Let them have the rest. We have worked enough; and, after all, there are things more priceless than gold," said Captain Harwood.

And, with this, the flying ship arose and sailed for the home of the brave.

THE END.

Next week's issue, No. 11, will contain "The Young Silver Hunters; or, The Lost City of the Andes," a story of Perilous and Exciting Adventures, by Cornelius Shea. You may guess one thing about this story—that is the quality. You'll guess, of course, that it's good, and you'll guess right the very first time.

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